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Truth in Labeling

African-Americans have been overrepresented in special education for decades. Experts now say that regular ed teachers can play a big part in reversing the trend.

See page 8.

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NEA Today

January 2003

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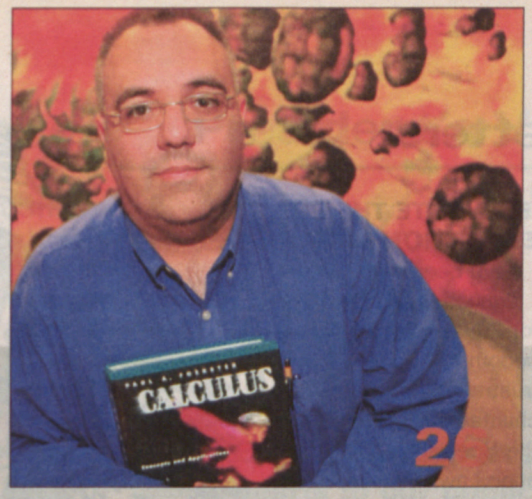

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Letters

NAVIGATING RELIGION

Any teacher who's good at what he does—especially in the upper grades—has been working religion into his presentations all along (November cover story). In my history and behavioral science classes, we're always discussing aspects of scripture and faith, from the psychology of Job to the creation myths of the Koran to Carl Jung's ideas on faith and superstition.

But that's not what's meant when people use the buzzwords "religion in the classroom." The only people making an issue of this are the religious right. They aren't about nuance or diversity or tolerance, they're about sectarian prayer and repudiating 2,000 years of philosophy, science, and rational thought.

Right-wingers all over the country are trying to get the Ten Commandments posted in public schools, in the name of religious freedom. Think they'd put up with quotations of love and learning from Buddha or Confucius, or even the Five Pillars of Islam? Or even just Commandments five through ten (the common-sense morality stuff)?

My suggestion for those teachers still free of the far-left's PC arrogance and the far right's Jesus-or-else agenda is to follow your instincts and teach the children well. We wouldn't be the nation we are without a strong background of faith, and just reinforcing that is a powerful lesson in what it means to be American.

David Siegle
Ware, Massachusetts

I was very disappointed that *NEA Today* propagated the lie about the separation of church and state. Nowhere in the Constitution or Bill of Rights is the separation of church and state mentioned! That is a myth being spread by forces that don't want religious morals and ethics "messing things up." The First Amendment simply prohibits Congress from creating a state religion. The phrase "separation of church and state" came from a letter by Thomas Jefferson.

The truth is that the separation is only a one-way street. The state is to stay out of religion but religion is allowed and expected to influence the state. It is only when office holders bring morality to their office that government behaves honorably. When God is told to stay out of government, why is it a surprise when we see office holders behave ungodly?

The article did a good job of explaining how educators can teach about religion without teaching a religion. Hopefully the article will encourage more teachers to bring their religious values to the classroom so that students (and perhaps other faculty and staff) will learn by example about moral behavior.

John Draftz
Phoenix, Arizona

IF I WROTE THE SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW...

I have been a special education teacher for 28 years and have become increasingly frustrated and disenchanted ("If I Wrote the Special Education Law," November).

Our jobs have been totally taken over by meaningless paperwork, and we are being meetinged to death.

I spend every free moment making sure I am setting up meetings by the due dates, phoning parents to check their schedules, checking the schedules of principals, teachers, and other IEP team members to find a mutual time. Then the endless sea of paperwork begins.

I work with a new, young, enthusiastic LD teacher who is a great asset to our profession. She is already disenchanted by the meetings and paperwork and has proclaimed many times that she just wants to *teach!*

She is already planning for a new career—what a loss!

Fran St. Andre
New London, Wisconsin

Paperwork is a burden, but it may be a necessary evil to force districts to provide services. How many times have we heard that unless it is in the student's IEP, they don't get it? If districts lived up to their commitment to provide quality education for *all* students, IEPs would not be necessary. Look at your district and ask yourself what would be your student's fate with no IEP.

I hate paperwork, but it allows students to get the services that they rightfully need.

Dave Hegner
Newton, New Jersey

I am a special education teacher. My suggestions for changing the law are:

- Limit self-contained classrooms to 12 children;
- Guarantee sufficient time to write IEPs;
- Separate low-functioning kids with behavior problems from low-functioning kids who do not have horrendous behaviors and are ready to learn.

It is not fair to the children who can really make gains in an academic, self-contained environment when one or two children are throwing furniture or screaming or hurting others and take all the time of the professional staff.

It is not fair to the kids with behaviors, either. They are not being served because they are not in a classroom that focuses on behavior.

Merrie Miller
Portland, Oregon

I am a resource teacher. Working in this field for 10 years, I have experienced the frustration of a system that enables one maladapted behavior after another.

Behavioral contracts are regularly broken, only to be followed by more behavioral contracts, which in many cases are violated again.

The problem is there is no bottom line!

Shane Walter
Oroville, California

The biggest change that NEA needs to make regarding the IDEA is a change in attitude. NEA continually sets up a We versus They paradigm.

Mainstream, "regular" education students are the We, who are being shortchanged, impinged upon, inconvenienced, by the They—the special education students who take away funding, lower standards, and disrupt the teaching that is really intended for the We.

NEA Today is all about those We students. Rarely are the They recognized inside its covers, except if they are mainstreamed into the We classes or participate as honorary We's in some schoolwide affair.

It's time NEA practiced Full Inclusion. You could feature the achievements of special education students. Celebrate what works for these students on their own terms. Special education pupils should not be considered lesser people who need to be fixed to be just like the "regular" pupils. Nor should they ever be blamed because they cost more to educate or require intensive services.

Sue Douglass
Castro Valley, California

In response to Don Brothers in Indiana: I understand that you like to have your students together and enjoy building strong relationships with them. Your special students are also very special to the other educators in your building. Please don't take away our time with them.

Inclusion, with necessary support personnel, benefits all students. Those with disabilities need to feel that they are a part of the "real" world. Working in cooperative learning groups helps them develop a deeper understanding of the course material and build self-esteem.

The other students learn that special needs kids can add ideas and share expertise during the variety of classroom activities.

All students can learn to be compassionate and caring people. It has to be a good thing.

Ada Zimmerman
Canton, Ohio

I am a middle school art teacher. I am disturbed by the idea that special education students should be mainstreamed into elective classes without regard to their ability, behavior, the size of the class, or the need for support from an aide. Don't get me wrong: If a child can handle it, I embrace them with open arms. But this blanket policy is not always best.

The misconception that special ed students will be fine in our classes because they are "hands-on" is, quite frankly, insulting. Students in my class are expected to be able to read directions, write intelligible answers to questions, and do their homework just like in any other class. Why do we put students who require extra attention, small class settings, and structured learning environments into the largest classes with tools and equipment that could be dangerous if not used properly?

Heidi Baker
Plainfield, Illinois

I enjoyed "Navigating Religion in the Classroom." I teach AP history and I cover the history of religion in my classes. How can I talk about the Reformation, the Great Awakening, the Enlightenment, or colonization without talking about religion?

I don't advocate any religion. My students have no idea what my personal religion is, nor do they need to know because it is completely irrelevant to my teaching history. There is a difference between teaching religion (historically) and advocating a religion. I would say the guidelines you set out in the article were good ones.

John Irish
Katy, Texas

I teach high school literature. How can we seriously discuss *Macbeth* without addressing the fate of his soul if he should kill the king? How can we discuss Eliezer's loss of faith in *Night*, if we don't know anything about his Jewish faith? How can we consider the competing visions of Christianity and Marxism in *Cry, the Beloved Country* if we don't first expose those visions? Why does Rebecca Nurse in *The Crucible* refuse to break the commandment "Thou shalt not lie," thus condemning herself to hang for witchcraft? Why does Govinda in *Siddhartha* follow the Buddha after hearing his Four Noble Truths, while Siddhartha himself does not? How can we laugh at Chaucer's satirical exposé of the Medieval Christian church in *The Canterbury Tales* without understanding something about Christian belief?

If we want students to think critically, how can we not include religion in our classrooms?

Matthew Wilson
Portland, Oregon

Thank you for your informative, balanced, unbiased, and respectful article "Navigating Religion in the Classroom." It's too bad the NEA can't be so informative, balanced, unbiased, and respectful when it comes to politics.

Debbie Meservey
Appleton, Maine

Let's Talk

Share your ideas, comments, and opinions with *NEA Today* in one of four ways:

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- By E-mail: Write to neatoday@nea.org
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Letters are edited for length and clarity.

DON'T CRUSH CRUSHES

I was shocked at most of the advice I saw in the article on student crushes (Dilemma, November). Crushes are very normal for everyone at some time in their lives! To have a student removed from class is crazy and mean.

Keeping your distance, talking about your spouse or significant other, is all you should ever have to do for a crush. Do not humiliate a student for having natural feelings. Crushes take care of themselves over time. I'm glad none of the teachers I had crushes on were like some of the teachers who wrote in!

Dave Oland
Kansas City, Kansas

WHY PEOPLE LEAVE

Bravo on Reg Weaver's "A Respect Shortage" (President's Viewpoint, November). I agree that teacher shortages are linked to working conditions, such as class size and shrinking resources. I would add that teachers need to be able to remove chronically disruptive students, and elementary teachers need more planning time! We're well-trained in delivering quality instruction, but are never provided the time it takes to implement it. It's that kind of needless frustration that has a record number of people leaving the profession.

John Letz
Medford, Oregon

I would like to add to what Reg Weaver said that what is in short supply is respect for our children. What do children think when they pass the beautiful new courthouse or Department of Motor Vehicles building and get dropped off at the old, rundown school with row upon row of portable classrooms, broken windows, shredded carpet, and outdated textbooks? Why should they respect education?

Judith Valen
Rancho Murieta, California

THINKOLOGY

John Desmond (Degrees in Thinkology, November) hit the nail on the scarecrow's brainless head when it comes to standardized testing. These tests wash out all individual differences, eliminate creativity, and disregard the essence of excellent teaching.

Anita Charles
Windham, Maine

DO AS YOU ARE TOLD

I've made a poster out of the following words from Sara Poppish's letter (September) and have it posted in my classroom:

"Children need to understand that everything in life is not a choice.

Sometimes you have to do as you are told."

Karen Fyke
Eureka, Illinois

President's Viewpoint

BY REG WEAVER

Thank You, ESPs

Education support professionals, you give your hearts to our public schools and students, and your struggle for better pay, health care, and professional development is our struggle.

I want to let you in on a little secret of mine. Whenever I go to a school for the first time, I try to get there early so that I can visit with our ESPs.

There is a reason why I do this.

I want to find out whether the ESPs are comfortable, confident, and secure in knowing that they are important members of the school team, because that tells me a lot about the school.

For me, there is no such thing as "just a" cafeteria worker or "just a" custodian or "just a" bus driver—no way! Every single person who works in a school or a school district office makes a contribution to the students' education. And every education support professional that I know seems to do many jobs.

One minute a school secretary might be trying to get the principal organized, and the next minute she may be comforting a feverish child who is waiting for his mother to pick him up from school. At the same time that a cafeteria worker serves lunch, she might be coaxing a smile out of a sad-faced child. A custodian may go from fixing a broken boiler to helping a student fix a broken bike. And when not behind the wheel, a bus driver might very well be collecting warm winter clothes for children who do not have them.

ESPs work closely with our students and care deeply about what happens to them. It's that simple. You are the unsung heroes of our schools. Almost always underpaid and often underappreciated, you help to create an environment in our schools that is safe and conducive to learning.

"You are the unsung heroes of our schools."

I've always been a great believer that "attitude determines altitude," and you spread that positive, can-do attitude that can lift up an entire school. What's more, you provide our schools with a vital link to our communities because most of you live where you work. You often know a student's parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles—and you know the hopes and dreams they've invested in their kids. You can play a crucial role in getting families more involved in their children's education.

As a teacher, there is something else I've long appreciated about ESPs. You really sympathize with how hard we must work. I remember one special education paraprofessional telling me: "The teacher I work with does the IEPs, the behavior modification plans, and the paperwork required by the state and federal governments. I assist her in implementing her plans. But at the end of the day, she has to take the job home with her."

I wish that I could wave a wand, and every single ESP in every public school would instantly receive the living wage and health care coverage that you deserve—and the professional development that you hunger for. I cannot. But please know that I am focused and committed to NEA working diligently to achieve these goals for you as well as other educators.

I am also focused and committed to doing everything we can to see that classroom paraeducators receive the education and professional development they need to fulfill the requirements of the newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I say we turn the challenge of this new law into an opportunity.

NEA is a family made up of ESPs, teachers, higher education faculty, and student and retired educators who work together in the name of children, students, and public education—that's what we are all about. Whatever affects one of us, affects us all. That is why NEA appreciates and honors you!

Comments? E-mail Reg Weaver at RegWeaver@nea.org.

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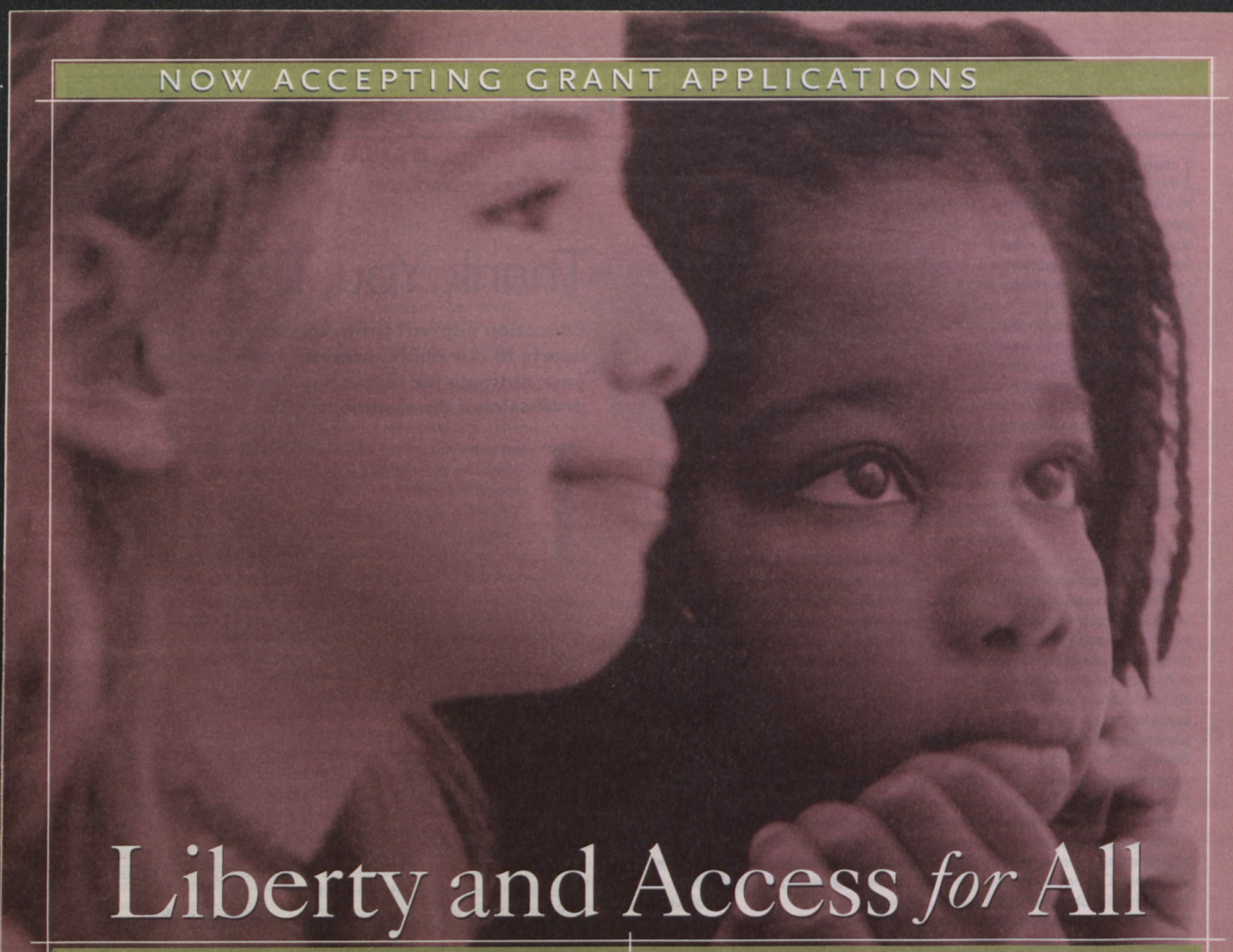

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Sniper Attack

A teacher opens the school door to discover one of her students has been shot.

BY KAREN PUMPHREY

I thought he was kidding. Eighth-grade boys have a way of kidding about the most serious matters. It's part of their charm. And this boy was definitely charming—the kind of kid you love to have in class.

Just the previous Friday, he had smiled as he endured the good-natured chiding of his classmates. He had created a collage that I had assigned to another class, not his. As he pulled it from his binder, the other students pointed out that he had wasted his time. He had done a superfluous assignment "for nothing." He sheepishly began to put it away. I stopped him and told him I'd count it as extra credit. Suddenly, his classmates wished they had made the same mistake. "Ha," he grinned, satisfied that his effort would pay off after all. I dismissed the class to their buses. The weekend was underway.

Charles Votaw

The following Monday, October, unfolded routinely. Although a sniper had terrorized the area, the weekend had been quiet. Those horrific events felt alien somehow, anyway. They were happening in other places to other people. Not very far away, to be sure, but not here either. Benjamin Tasker Middle School, nestled in the leafy suburbs of Washington, is the kind of place where teachers are content, students are safe, and parents are satisfied. (Insofar as teachers can be content, students can be safe, and parents can be satisfied.) The weightiest concerns usually involve bathroom passes and hallway traffic patterns.

Hurrying through the hallway to a meeting, I heard a loud "bang" on the front door and then yelling. I assumed that some of the rowdiness that sometimes accompanies the bus ride was being carried a little too close to the building. I headed to the door intending to admonish the offenders. I opened the door and was surprised to find no one near it. I saw the boy close to the curb, doubled over and on his knees. "What are you doing?" I asked, somewhat annoyed that he was carrying on so dramatically.

"I'm shot," he said, as he went down on his side. I was unsure what to think. Was this kid playing with me? Would he joke about something like that given recent events?

"Are you kidding?" I asked, half believing and certainly hoping that he was doing just that.

Shot? Kids don't get shot. Kids don't get shot in front of their schools. Kids don't get shot in front of their schools on an ordinary Monday morning in safe and sheltered suburbs. Not good kids who do extra credit homework. Not nice kids who smile and joke, and play and write, and draw and laugh. Shot?

I looked to where he was clutching his abdomen. There was nothing to indicate that he was injured except the look on his face. I looked around—no one else was in sight. I knew he was in pain, but surely, I thought, not shot. All the news of the sniper must have made him think he was shot. Maybe he pulled a muscle. Maybe he had appendicitis.

I leaned over and told him I'd get some help. As I stood up, I noticed a car, which I assumed had brought him to school, backing up toward us.

I went back in the building and told the secretary to call an ambulance. I told her a student was shot out in front of the building. Even as I said it, I still didn't believe it.

Within seconds I was out front again, accompanied by the principal, administrators, and every teacher in the vicinity. We returned to the curb to find...nothing. No student, no blood, no indication that anything was wrong. If it wasn't for the backpack left against the bricks I might have thought I was hallucinating. The car that had dropped the boy off was pulling out of the parking lot.

"He was right here. He said he was shot," I explained to the puzzled assemblage. Maybe he was kidding. I hoped he was kidding. We all hoped he was kidding.

The call came from the medical center down the street confirming the gunshot injury to the student. His aunt had taken him directly to the facility. He was in critical condition. Within minutes the school was transformed into a fortress. Administrators diverted the buses, and security personnel put emergency plans into effect. Police seemed to outnumber students. Helicopters hovered over the campus, and in the surreal atmosphere fear was palpable. For the first time, I realized that the "bang" on the door was actually the gunshot.

The media blitz was immediate. Our quiet, anonymous middle school was on every channel in the country. The world changed for us as a community and as a school that day. The world changed for me as a parent and teacher. It will certainly never be the same for the victim.

Oh, my God, he wasn't kidding. 4

Karen Pumphrey teaches science at Benjamin Tasker Middle School in Bowie, Maryland. One of her 13-year-old students was one of 13 victims in a series of sniper attacks that terrorized the Washington, D.C., area in October. The student is recovering. For resources on dealing with crisis in schools, visit www.neahin.org/programs/schoolsafety/index.htm.

Everyone who works in schools knows there's a certain rhythm to the school day.

There's the academic part, and, after school, a whole other rhythm of sports and extracurricular activities clicks in.

For the most part, schools in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area were able to stay on their academic schedules during this past fall's six-week sniper ordeal though they frequently operated in lock-down mode. But while the academic pace of schools continued in a more or less normal way, the after-school rhythm was thrown way off.

Bill Fischer
editor

School officials were forced to call off many games. Practices, if they were held at all, were held indoors. As weeks passed and the fall sport season slipped away, school administrators took some unusual steps to get athletes back on the field of play.

On one October weekend in Northern Virginia, hundreds of high school athletes rode buses for more than two hours to Richmond and Charlottesville, Virginia, to play their field hockey and football games.

When some of those games were rained out, and no other playing fields were available, some teams played their games on military bases.

Field hockey teams played on the fields at the army base at Fort Myer in Arlington, Virginia, and the Marine base at Quantico, watched only by the soldiers on the base. (Athletes' parents could only attend these games if they rode on the team bus.)

When the suspected snipers were arrested, and normal play could resume, school officials were left to figure out how to finish the regular schedule as well as tournaments to determine champions in football, soccer, field hockey, and other sports.

Still student athletes seemed to roll with the times, playing with their usual exuberance. The rhythm had returned.

Bill Fischer

When it comes to special ed and African-American kids, it's time for...

Truth *in* Labeling

A Scenario: There's a boy in your class. He's Black, he's loud, he kicks his chair when he's upset and mocks you when you try to discipline him. His reading skills are dismal, he has language quirks you just don't "get," and he walks around agitated when it's time to focus. You've tried some fixes, but little seems to work. Question: Do you refer the boy to a special education teacher for an assessment? Or do you grit your teeth, keep him in your class, and continue the good fight? It's your decision to make, and you may well forge on. But national data suggest the odds are fairly high you won't, that in the end this child will end up a student of special education—not simply because he's been marked as having "problems," but, disturbingly, because he's Black and he's male.

On its face, this racial link may seem startling and unfair, even insidious. But, say government researchers, the statistics tell the tale: Nationally, African-American students show up in certain special education categories—the ones where the diagnosis is largely subjective—in numbers that so exceed their proportion in the general population, that some experts are now calling it a crisis.

Consider this: Blacks are nearly three times more likely than whites to be labeled mentally retarded (up to five times more in some states) and twice as likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed. Across the board the risks are higher for Black males than Black females. Even when accounting for the often-debilitating effects of poverty on early cognitive development, the overrepresentation is still there—and glaringly, according to researchers at the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. In fact, the odds of being labeled "mentally retarded" actually increase for African-American boys in middle and upper income school districts.

The implications for educators, for students, for social policy are profound, says Gary Orfield, professor of education and social policy at Harvard University and co-editor of the book, *Racial Inequity in Special Education*. Black students in special education, he says, are far more likely than their white peers to be isolated from mainstream classes, stigmatized, and suspended from school, then become drop-outs, face unemployment, and go to jail.

It's not fun stuff to talk about, Orfield notes, given the remarkable contribution special education has made to society over the decades. "[It] has been the great American accomplishment," he says. "But just like most good things, it can be misused." And in some critical areas, Orfield adds, it has.

A COMPLEX PROBLEM

What exactly has gone awry? To be sure, it's a question that has quietly percolated for the more than 30 years so-called "disproportionality" has been on the social policy radar. Civil rights activists and some educators have long argued that culturally biased IQ tests and unconscious bias among teachers are part of the problem—strands in an exceedingly complex web of causes that make the issue so emotion-charged and confounding. In the last few years as more solid data have emerged, many more educators, policy makers, and researchers have come to agree—but are now digging deeper into the question: What to do? And while they've come up with plenty big-picture solutions—more equitable funding of high-poverty schools, more uniform and unbiased criteria for testing, more certified special education teachers—some of the more promising answers fall squarely in the laps of regular education teachers. The teachers on the front lines. The teachers who have the best opportunity to make a difference before "special education" even becomes attached to a child's name.

From the President, who commissioned a recent report on special education; to the National Academy of Sciences, which published a groundbreaking study last year; to a bevy of minority organizations; indeed, to the NEA itself—the clarion cry goes like this: Equip teachers with new strategies to teach diverse students, make them more aware of cultural nuances, give

Photo©LWA-Dann Tardif/Corbis

them the tools to intervene early and effectively in the life of an at-risk child, and the likelihood is high that these kids will succeed—many without getting a referral at all.

"It's not to say there won't be kids who will require special education services," says Patti Ralabate, NEA's special education specialist, "but this process helps schools focus those resources on those who truly need them." And by giving the right supports to regular education teachers, she adds, "kids no longer have to fail before they can get help."

Already in areas around the country—Illinois, Seattle, New York—administrators are taking steps to make sure these kinds of reforms are in place. But few places are attacking the problem as holistically as officials are trying to in the state of Alabama.

UNLIKELY ADVOCATE

Its name long synonymous with racial strife, Alabama may seem an unlikely champion for change—and to be sure, it was not the lone instigator for this one. It was a 1997 judicial review of consent decrees from a longstanding school desegregation suit, *Lee v. Macon,* which found, among other things, that Black Alabama students were more than three times more likely to be labeled mentally retarded than whites. The court declared this unacceptable and two years ago, this rural Black Belt state took the lead in mapping out an attack plan. Significantly, it was geared as much to improving how teachers taught and assessed all students as it was to how they taught and assessed Blacks. It included:

- Statewide awareness training to help teachers not only understand the overrepresentation issue, but become familiar with a multitude of instructional and classroom management strategies to help all students learn better;
- A new pre-referral process that requires teachers to use a host of intervention strategies, with the help of mentors and school-based support teams, for at least six weeks before even considering a referral;
- A revamped assessment process for determining who is mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed as well as the use of new, more culturally sensitive aptitude measurements;
- Re-evaluation of minorities who were borderline mentally retarded students;
- A state improvement grant to fund the changes;
- Regular monitoring of the district progress.

It was not meant to be a quick fix, nor an end in and of itself. But after more than a year of effort, state officials have charted small, encouraging signs of progress. The number of special education students overall has dropped; and the number of Black students identified for mental retardation decreased 2 percent (1,700 were re-identified as having specific learning disabilities and 400 "tested out" of special ed altogether). In addition, 500 fewer Black students were identified as emotionally disturbed.

And though teachers have hardly been across-the-board wowed by the required training—some have dismissed it as unhelpful and time-consuming—others have roundly applauded its benefits. Indeed, in places where pieces of the reform had begun before the consent decree was even official, teachers say the results have been eye-opening, even empowering. And, they add, at-risk kids are learning and succeeding.

MAKING IT WORK

Take Lee County, a poor, rural speck of a place just 8 miles from Auburn near the Georgia border. One could miss it driving through that quiet stretch of Highway 51. But if only to witness the newfound enthusiasm of some of the teachers, it is, arguably, worth the stop.

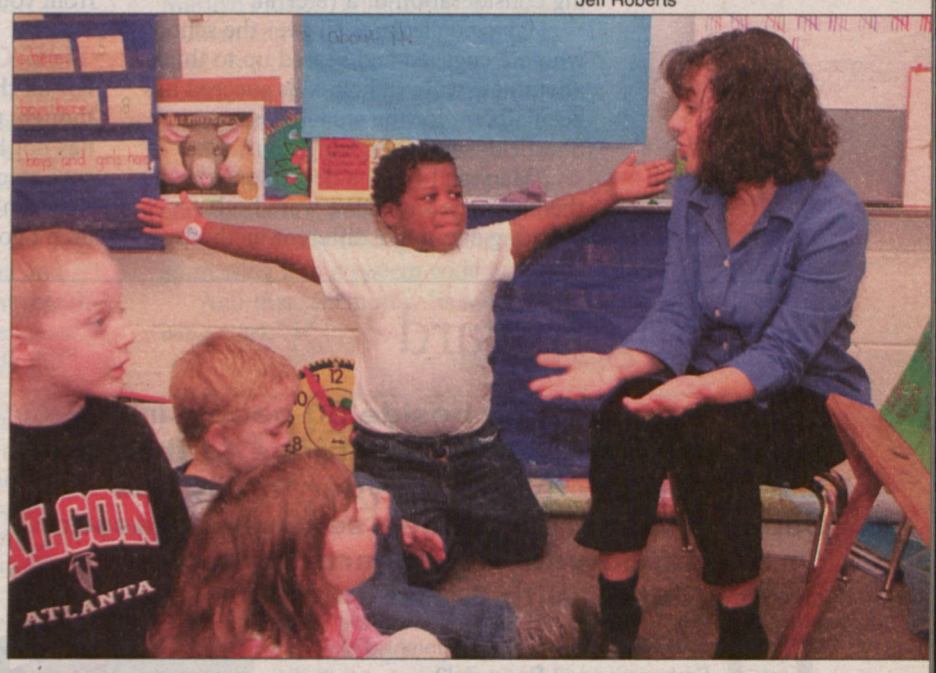
For years in Lee County, referrals of African-American students to special education was off the charts—and the evidence stunned. As recent as 1999, Blacks made up 59 percent of kids labeled mentally retarded and 44 percent of the emotionally disturbed, even though they make up 23 percent of the student population.

Then two years ago, the county instructional director, Eddie Clark, decided to take action. He directed all elementary teachers to begin learning and using multiple teaching strategies, particularly in reading and math, so learning for all children could improve as early as possible. Clark, an NEA member and former special education teacher, urged schools to establish grade level "teams" so teachers could confer and give special attention to students who were struggling, flexibly re-grouping them in at-risk classes that they would move in and out of as needed. These children would be held to the same academic standards, the thinking went, but would benefit the most from innovative, individualized teaching. As the *Lee v. Macon* consent decree kicked in, Clark began helping teachers develop what he calls a "mindset" change around special education—looking at it not as a place, but as services to be used after teachers have given all they've got.

"Before, all teachers had to do was make a modification or accommodation," Clark notes, "It was, 'Okay, I'll stand beside the child. I'll help him unpack his book bag. Instead of 20 spelling words, I'll give him 15.' Then many would go ahead and refer. Now they're looking at how they actually teach the child." Too, they're engaging in more pointed self-appraisal—asking questions, for example, about their own potential biases. (See "Looking Inward," page 10.)

The result: special education referrals for Blacks have dropped to zero this year. The numbers of Blacks labeled emotionally disturbed have declined to 30 percent of the total and those deemed mentally retarded to 40 percent. Students are doing better academically, too. But more importantly, some teachers say they have been transformed as educators.

Jeff Roberts



Mary Sanders, who teaches at-risk K-1 kids, says she comes to the classroom every day believing every child can learn—and succeed.

A COLLABORATION

In Opelika, at Beauregard Elementary School, a spanking new school where the Black students make up about 30 percent of enrollment and half the school is on free or reduced lunches, fourth-grade teacher Marcy Sherfield says the emphasis on new ways of teaching has reinvigorated her—and inspired her kids. "I haven't been teaching a long time, but long enough to get caught into the same routine," she says. "It was like, 'I'm teaching this way and I'm going to do it like this.' And so this made me sit down and redirect myself—to think, I can change this."

Mary Sanders, a colleague who teaches a K-1 transition class, agrees. The *Lee v. Macon* training confirmed the value of what she and her colleagues had already begun to do, she says. Now she finds herself constantly experimenting with a wide variety of approaches—even those she may not personally love. "I am not a scripted teacher, for instance, but if I'm doing my job, I fig-

ure out how to teach these children, period," she says. "It's not an excuse to say, 'Oh, but I don't like this,' or 'Oh, I don't believe in that.' I have to believe my children can learn."

The beauty of the reforms, she says, is that she can now go to a mentor—anybody she chooses in her school—to ask for help when she's at wit's end about what's best for a particular child. In fact, she must do this before formally going to what's known as the Building Based Student Support Team (BBSST). This team of counselors and teachers, newly required under *Lee v. Macon,* reviews everything the teacher has done, inquires about whether home-based visits have occurred, looks into medical and parental concerns, then lays out a six-week plan of instruction before allowing consideration of a referral.

Having colleagues all over the school who are engaged and geared up to think about new ways to help kids succeed has been a boon for the students, says Sherfield—and energizing, too.

"Mary and I had a debate one day in the hall," she says. "We were both debating about our different methods, and it was funny because I was saying, 'I believe in this way' and she was saying, 'I believe in that,' and we were talking also about what we both did like. But some people thought we were really upset at each other. We weren't. We were just excited."

Sharing ideas, in fact, is a constant. "I've had older teachers come in my room and say, 'You know, that's not working in our room,'" says Sanders. "So I have gone and just taken my whole class and we spend a week in that teacher's classroom doing a writing workshop to show that teacher how to implement reading and writing strategies through journal writing." Sherfield says she often goes to the special education teachers, and she'll say, "Okay, this is the situation I'm having. I've tried all these things, but I still want to hear from your area."

THE CHALLENGE

For all the energy and innovation, though, the teachers concede change has not been easy. They face great pressure teaching struggling kids, knowing they can't so easily move on if things aren't going well. "Many kids come to

school angry," says Penny Call, a second-grade at-risk teacher. "I just think they're frustrated, but they come in defensive because they haven't learned. It's not that they can't, but they just missed it somewhere. So I've learned you really have to take a lot of time and talk to them. You set the pace a little slower then slowly speed up. If they get out of control, you don't say, 'I don't

Looking Inward

Imagine queuing up beside 50 people in a room and being ordered to move to the other side if you or anybody in your family has been on welfare. Or been sexually harassed. Or been followed in a department store, or don't identify with Christianity.

How would you feel? Diminished? Embarrassed? Powerful?

James Patton, professor of education at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, routinely engages educators in this so-called "crosswalk" exercise as part of what he calls "cultural therapy"—getting people to come to grips with their cultural "other," as a way of understanding how their own life experiences shape the judgments they make about their students.

His work is part of a growing movement to help educators become "culturally competent"—or as University of South Florida professor Brenda Townsend likes to put it, "culturally responsive"—when interacting with children from backgrounds different from their own. The idea: unless you can accept and respect student differences, understand how to interpret them, then use them positively to help them learn, an unspoken chasm will develop. And biases that can make problems like disproportionality so intractable will fester.

Geoffrey Zipoli

But Patton and others say getting to a place of competency is necessarily hard work because it begins with turning a lens on oneself.

"When people think about culture, most people think, 'Mexican restaurant,'" he says. "They think about dance, customs, or clothes—the surface stuff. But if you look at where it really is, it's underneath where you can't see. The way you view beauty, subordinate relationships, group decision-making—all of these things are out of sight, but they are driven and shaped by culture."

In the case of the crosswalk, Patton explores power and privilege. "Usually the people who have it don't cross over," he says. Because so many kids who are overrepresented in special education come from families who feel powerless—and, in fact, are in many cases—Patton says getting educators to experience what that feels like, albeit simplistically, is often jarring and eye-opening.

But it's just a start. Educators must go the extra mile to understand, for example, that while African-Americans often move, talk, and dress differently, it doesn't mean something is wrong with them. "There are language differences—and I'm not just talking Ebonics, but also slang," says Townsend. Often it's loud and lively—but misinterpreted as confrontational, or dismissed as invalid. African-American boys have been shown to be "vervistic"—they have a propensity for lots of movement and rhythm. "It's very much a part of our culture," yet often that's seen as hyperactivity, says Townsend. Black girls sometimes twist and jerk their necks to communicate, but that's considered rebellious.

To help educators think about how to work creatively with these differences, Townsend and Gwendolyn Webb-Johnson, an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin, present what they call a "reality classroom" at various conferences and seminars. They use African-American schoolchildren to demonstrate how to deal with issues such as loudness, talking out of turn, aggression—and the often heady issues that emerge out of poverty and family dysfunction.

"It's not about sidetracking academics, or saying a child should not sit quietly," says Webb-Johnson. "It's about meeting him with his strengths first and then using that to teach him what's important in the classroom." Playing hip-hop music to teach rhyme, or using black geometric hairstyles to do math, or pulling from a playground fight to problem-solve—all foster connections and classroom harmony and helps kids learn, Webb-Johnson says.

"It's a challenge," concedes Townsend. "In many ways educators have to learn to be cultural brokers. They have to help kids negotiate behaviors—decide what setting is right for which." Still, she adds, "They can't make kids feel they have to check their culture at the classroom door."

–M.M.

For more: Contact Dr. Brenda L. Townsend at BTownsend@tempest.coedu.usf.edu; Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Johnson at gwebbj@mail.utexas.edu, and Dr. James M. Patton at jmpatton@wm.edu.

Marcy Sherfield, working here with a fourth grader, says discovering alternative methods of teaching has energized her, and made her a better teacher.

Jeff Roberts

have the time; go sit in the corner.' You say, 'What's up today? I'm sorry you didn't sleep well. It's okay to be mad, but let's figure out how we can let go of that anger."

Call thinks of a child she teaches who smiles every time he gets in trouble. "It used to make me so mad because I thought he was being rude, laughing at me, but he wasn't. That's just inside him—his instinct."

Understanding the nuances can make for a bumpy ride—which is why the behavior management strategies and cultural awareness training offered under *Lee v. Macon* helped, says Sanders. "It was a great refresher on stuff I'd forgotten."

But there are other issues, too, not the least of which is actually having time. "It's hard," says Sanders. "I have 12 children reading on 12 different levels. You need the time to teach them, but you need time to prepare, and especially to talk to parents. You're constantly meeting with parents, because you have to form partnerships to give these children support."

While Clark allows time for professional development every nine weeks—he says he's lobbying for more—even he acknowledges it's not enough. The Alabama Education Association sponsors workshops, as does the school's professional development committee, and teachers can access the *Lee v. Macon* strategies anytime by CD-ROM. The teachers say they take advantage of those, in most cases using their free time to bone up on new methods. "But then," says Sanders, "you've got to try them out. And that's where patience and persistence comes in."

THE GOOD FIGHT

National experts say that persistence and patience, in fact, is what will be required at all levels if real change is going to happen—and in many corners the buzz is that it must and will.

Late last year, for example, both the Washington-based Council for Exceptional Children and the National Alliance of Black School Educators held national conferences on the overrepresentation issue. Earlier, the Southeast Regional Resource Center, one of six regional centers established by the federal Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, brought together state administrators to share ideas about what's working to remedy the problem, and what's not. Last September, NEA President Reg Weaver strongly urged President Bush to use his muscle to spur congressional hearings on the issue and all its complexities.

But this is just the beginning, and the panoply of needed fixes can be dizzying. (See Interview, page 13.) "In many ways it starts at the teacher training level," says Asa Hilliard, a renowned professor in the Georgia State University Department of Education Psychology and Special Education. Hilliard, who has studied disproportionality for 30 years, says if more professors of education were truly "master teachers," more of their students would emerge from the ranks with a keener understanding of how to bring out the best in even the neediest kids. Without great training, he says, "neither the genius of children can be revealed, nor the genius of teaching."

Others cite a host of other "musts": stepped up monitoring of school districts by the Office of Civil Rights; more attention to Hispanics, who are often underrepresented because language barriers mask their disabilities; more focus on empowering minority parents, who often are too intimidated by the referral process to effectively advocate for their children; more certified teachers in high-poverty districts. The list goes on.

"It's formidable work," concedes Marilyn Hutton, an attorney in NEA's Human and Civil Rights department. "This is a problem, after all, that's been decades in the making, and it's unrealistic to expect it'll get solved overnight."

"The good news," Hutton goes on, "is that it's finally seeing the light of day—and legislators, policy makers, and educators are actually talking together about addressing it in a system-wide way."

And that, she notes, "is a very promising start." ✔

—Marilyn Milloy

RESOURCES

Meeting the Challenge: Special Education Tools That Work for All Kids and *The New IDEA Survival Guide.* Contact the NEA Professional Library at www.nea.org/books or 800/229-4200.

NEA Human and Civil Rights Department, annually sponsors sessions on cultural competency at the pre-RA NEA Joint Conference on Concerns of Minorities and Women. Contact Marilyn Hutton at mhutton@nea.org.

NEA IDEA Special Education Resource Cadre helps members access professional development opportunities. Contact Patti Ralabate at pralabate@nea.org.

Minority Students in Special and Gifted Education. National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. Visit www.nap.edu or call 800/624-6242.

Racial Inequity in Special Education, by Daniel J. Losen and Gary Orfield, The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Visit www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights.

"Addressing Over-Representation of African American Students in Special Education: The Prereferral Process, published by the IDEA Partnerships. Visit www.ideapractices.org/resources/files/AddressingOverRep.pdf.

Alabama State Department of Education, Office of Special Education Services. Visit www.alsde.edu or contact Dorothea Walker at dwalker@alsde.edu.

The Council for Exceptional Children: www.cec.sped.org/.

Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence: www.crede.ucsc.edu.

For many more resources, visit www.nea.org/neatoday.

The Politics of IDEA—Revisited

The reauthorization of the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is now on the political plate in Washington, and the overrepresentation of minorities promises to be one of the hot potato issues. Why? Because the Administration believes that fully funding IDEA—forking over the federal government's long-promised 40 percent share of the funds—might not be so necessary if, in reality, students are being targeted for special education services who don't really need them.

The Problem: The federal government has long balked at fully funding IDEA—it currently only provides 17 percent of the funds the law requires—and so, say NEA officials, using the disproportionality issue to beg off amounts to yet another stalling tactic. In truth, notes NEA lobbyist Kim Anderson, "regardless of how many children are receiving services, special education has always been underfunded because the federal government has never lived up to its promise."

Why fully fund? The number of students in the general population has soared to record numbers over the years and that has meant more special education students. Yet the concurrent need for more resources, says Anderson, has gone neglected. In addition, Hispanic and other minority students have been dramatically underrepresented for certain special education services; their proper identification will bring the numbers up, even if African-American numbers come down. Quality professional development in every school district—critical to improving both general and special education teaching—will be costly, as well. Finally, the costs of special education for the severely disabled continue to grow as technology advances and increasing numbers are mainstreamed.

NEA urges members to wise up about the importance of full funding—and about other critical principles that will make for a "better IDEA."

How You Can Help: Go to NEA's Legislative Action Center at www.nea.org/lac and complete the IDEA survey. Then contact your members of Congress to tell them what you think—and prepare to get involved.

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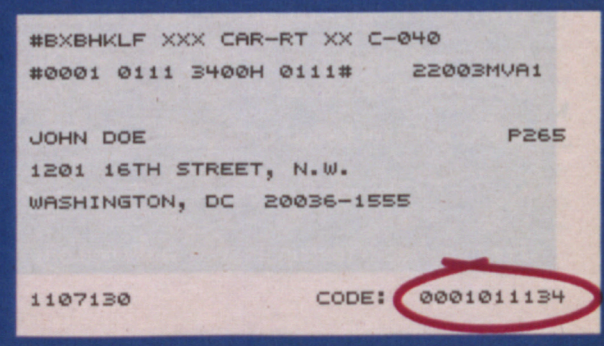
Here's how to register!

Go to www.owl.org. Click on the register button on the right hand side of the screen. Complete the registration form. You'll be asked for your 10-digit NEA membership number. It can be found on the mailing label of this copy of *NEA Today* (see illustration).



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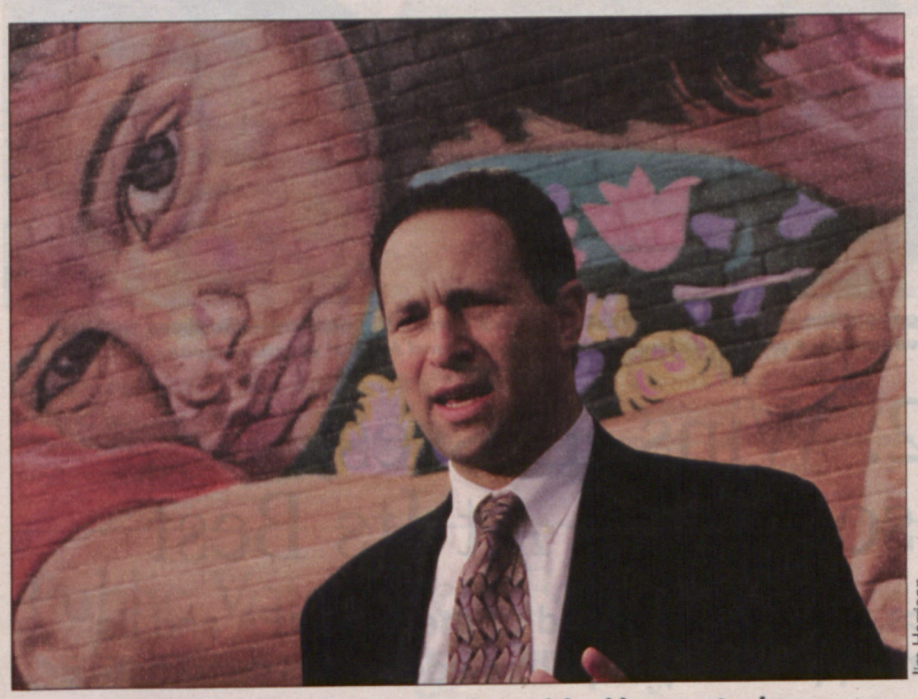
A Matter of Justice

A Harvard University researcher says problems of inequity in special education can be resolved—if all hands are on deck.



Jim Harrison

Dan Losen says disproportionality can't be explained by poverty alone.

Over the past few years, educators have been giving increasing attention to the overrepresentation of minority children in special education. Dan Losen, associate researcher at the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, contributes to the growing analysis with Racial Inequity in Special Education *(Harvard Education Press, 2002). A compilation of essays by more than 20 researchers, the book is co-edited with Gary Orfield, the Project's co-director. Losen, a former elementary school teacher, talks to* NEA Today's *Marilyn Milloy.*

What should educators make of your finding that poverty alone doesn't explain this problem?
They should be aware that unconscious racial discrimination plays a part and that this may be the tip of the iceberg because of all the other inequities we see flowing along the lines of race and class—disproportionate suspensions, tracking, the underrepresentation of certain minorities in gifted and talented classes.

This doesn't mean we're trying to make educators or teachers the bad guys, of course. We're part of a society where all kinds of racial biases and stereotypes affect our decisions every day. But rather than ignore them, we have to acknowledge that they exist, then track the disparities and think of ways to reduce them.

Bias and discrimination—those are loaded terms. Many people just don't see themselves bringing those attitudes into the classroom.
That's why we call it unconscious bias. We have to start with the acknowledgment that these are sociopolitical kinds of decisions that we're making about the kids. And when disparities like these are so large, we have to revisit what we're doing. That data shows that all minority kids are not always overrepresented, for instance. Most often it's Black children, and most often Black males, who carry the most negative stereotypes in this society. Also, we see very little racial disproportionality in the "hard" disability categories—deafness, blindness, autism—where you get a medical diagnosis without all the subjective elements.

Having said that, we don't need to do a lot of blaming. We just have to own it as a problem that we can solve, because the fact of the matter is that it's not all about discrimination, it's not all about poverty, it's not all about any one thing. High-stakes testing has played a part, for example.

What do you mean?
There have been perverse incentives to identify more kids who have special education or discipline issues as a way of weeding out some of the lower achievers in class. It's scary for teachers. If you're responsible for the outcome of your low achievers, and you feel you're not getting support to begin with, you have an overcrowded class, and now you have to do inclusion of two additional kids, you do what you can to ease the burden. There are definitely teachers who feel overwhelmed yet really want to do the best thing by these kids and do see special education as an opportunity for them to get more one-on-one instruction, to get into the smaller classroom. High-stakes tests add to the pressure, because when kids can be retained a grade or fail to get a diploma, it just ratchets everything up.

Children with disabilities won't escape testing pressures under the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
True, and we're actually very supportive of this principle of disaggregating achievement of all kids so that you can't mask things when the Black kids aren't doing well or the kids with disabilities aren't doing well. That said, we have some very serious concerns about schools being held accountable without being given the resources and the wherewithal to help kids meet these high standards.

What resources do you mean?
Funds to provide reading intervention and high-quality services for students, to pay for experienced teachers, and to support training and special development of teachers and mentor relationships. Many teachers may not be prepared well to teach a diverse group of learners. But the resources are not there, particularly in high minority districts. And now with states experiencing these budget crunches, to hold the schools accountable without providing the funds is just adding an injustice to a bad situation. Special education, for instance, has been inadequately funded for 25 years, and that resource shortfall has had a cumulative effect.

So where does the solution begin?
Our government has already said overrepresentation is a problem, and states are supposed to be collecting data, analyzing it, and intervening. During the reauthorization of IDEA, I think we can improve upon what the old law says by demanding that data be collected from every school in the district and reported publicly. That's a starting point, because this is not a problem everywhere. It's not a problem in every classroom, it's not a problem in every school.

Then once a racial disparity has been found that is really statistically unexplainable, we would ask the principal to find out if there's any kind of justification. Where there's no rational explanation, the school should have to put in place a plan—to not necessarily eliminate it, but to bring it under control. It would be an important start. ✔

Photos by Mark Tade

Through voluntary "phone banking" and other get-out-the-vote activities, NEA members across the country—like these teachers and support professionals in Cedar Rapids, Iowa—made a critical difference in tight state and federal election races.

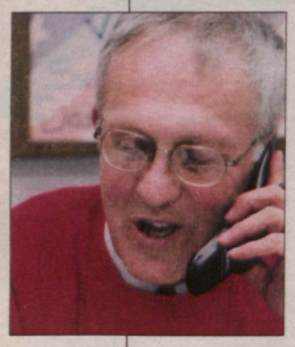
Election 2002: Wins, Losses, And Your Association At Its Best

No matter what your politics, you can be proud of the way NEA and its affiliates mobilized member support for pro-public education candidates.

Depending on your political viewpoint—and NEA members are scattered across the spectrum—the November election results were a disaster or a delight.

But no matter how you cut it, Campaign 2002 was an organizational triumph for NEA and its state affiliates, respected for their unique—and influential—member-driven candidate recommendation process, time-tested and tuned "get-out-the-vote" operation, and teacher/ESP voting rate that averages 70 to 75 percent in race after race.

By focusing exclusively on issues of children and public education and strongly supporting candidates—Democratic, Republican, or independent—who demonstrated support for benchmark NEA positions, Association activists exerted enormous influence in state and Congressional campaigns across the United States.



"We must continue to make contact with moderate Republicans and continue to work with them."

—Cedar Rapids Education Association President Gary Anhalt

At press time, NEA/state affiliate campaign work had helped push recommended candidates over the top in close governors' races in Arizona, Kansas, Maine, New Mexico, Oregon, and Pennsylvania. The result: The majority of NEA's 2.7 million members will now live in a state with a pro-public education governor, ready to work with teachers and ESPs to humanely implement the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

And the new, closely divided 108th Congress will include several lawmakers who won by razor-thin margins with critical Association support, including incoming Senators Tim Johnson (South Dakota) and Jim Matheson (Utah) and House members Tim Holden (Pennsylvania) and Dennis Moore (Kansas).

The bottom line: In 50 gubernatorial and congressional races targeted by NEA and state affiliates, wins and losses were split evenly at 25. And the Association succeeded in 13 of 16 state ballot initiatives or referenda targeted for passage or defeat by the NEA Ballot Measure/Legislative Crisis Fund (see "Public Votes 'Yes'" on page 15).

Move beyond the numbers, and the *real* bottom line is this:

■ **NEA put your PAC donations to good use.** NEA's 2002 campaign effort, financed through $6 million in voluntary member contributions to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education, involved a high degree of NEA-state affiliate coordination and a long, long list of tasks—topped by targeted member mailings (3.5 million pieces), extensive member and public polling, phone banking, field visits by NEA Executive Committee members, and "media buys" for recommended candidates in key Senate races.

Pulling it all together—and providing as-needed assistance to state affiliates—was a field staff of 56 NEA organizers. "These people left home and family to work in the states for two-and-a-half months," says NEA Government Relations Director Diane Shust. "They made a tremendous sacrifice because they believe in the cause and our members."

■ **NEA state and local affiliates mobilized their members.** Just one example: With assistance from two NEA staffers, the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA) helped re-elect all of its "targeted" gubernatorial and federal candidates—Governor Tom Vilsack, Senator Tom Harkin, and Congressmen Jim Leach and Leonard Boswell.

Through volunteer phone banking by teachers and teacher associates and grassroots organizing spearheaded by Association faculty reps, "our local accomplished 90 percent of what we wanted to do in this campaign," reports Gary Anhalt, president of the Cedar Rapids Education Association (CREA), ISEA's second largest affiliate.

"We got right down to the classroom level and made person-to-person contact," Anhalt stresses. "We told each member, 'We need your help in this campaign. Make sure somebody else goes to the polls with you.'"

Anhalt, a professional development facilitator for the Cedar Rapids district, says CREA members got a big morale boost from Democrat Rob Hogg, a pro-public education candidate for the Iowa legislature.

"Rob's actual margin of victory was 542 votes, and when you look at

the numbers, you can see we made a difference with our actual member vote," Anhalt notes. "Rob worked hard on a person-to-person campaign and energized our members. CREA hosted an open house for him, and members worked on phone banks for him, put signs in their yards, and talked Rob up in daily exchanges in the community."

■ **NEA followed—and will continue to follow—a bipartisan strategy.** CREA, ISEA, and NEA worked equally hard to re-elect pro-public education candidate Jim Leach to the U.S. House of Representatives—just one of NEA's 25 recommended Republican candidates for federal office.

"Congressman Leach is an independent thinker who can help us on educational issues," says Anhalt. "We must continue to make contacts with moderate Republicans and continue to work with them."

"Our work with moderate Republicans will become even more important as we work on budget issues in the new Republican-controlled Congress," adds NEA lobbyist Joel Packer. While the GOP needs at least 60 votes to pass legislation in the Senate, Packer explains, it only needs to muster 51 Senate votes to approve a budget resolution—which sets spending parameters for every spending item from education to homeland security.

"It's safe to say that Congress will move to extend all of last year's federal tax cuts [through a budget resolution]," Packer predicts. "Meanwhile, the overall budget situation is likely to deteriorate and the projected deficit will be large, creating further constraints on education spending plans." ✔

For more on developments in the 108th Congress—and what you can do—go to www.nea.org/lac.

Public Votes 'Yes' For School Funding, Quality

With NEA financial support, several state affiliates promoted or opposed ballot initiatives that involved education funding, quality of education, a minimum wage for ESPs and other workers, and abuse of the initiative/referendum process by public education opponents. A sampling of successes:

■ **Arkansas:** Voters defeated a constitutional amendment exempting certain items from sales tax, which would have reduced revenue for public schools.

■ **Arizona:** Residents approved propositions removing the current limitation on how much state sales tax revenue can be spent on education and directing earnings from public lands that are above the 2000-01 level to public education.

■ **California:** Taxpayers endorsed propositions authorizing a $13 billion school construction and renovation bond issue and increasing state grant funds by up to $550 million annually for before- and after-school programs.

■ **Colorado:** Voters defeated a state constitutional amendment "eliminating all other English language acquisition programs," including ESL (English as a Second Language) and bilingual and dual immersion programs, in favor of a one-size-fits-all segregated immersion program that would require all students to learn English in one year.

■ **Florida:** Residents endorsed constitutional amendments requiring the state to offer free, voluntary, and high-quality prekindergarten to every four-year-old by 2005-06 and set a maximum public school class size—and provide funding to meet this level by 2010.

■ **Oregon:** Voters passed ballot measures to increase Oregon's minimum wage to $6.90 in 2003 and adjust it for inflation in future years and to prohibit payment for initiative or referendum signatures received *(for more, see "Kudos To," right).* ✔

Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone (1944-2002): He Was One of Us

AP Photo/Ann Heisenfelt

"I speak out because education has consumed my adult life and education is my passion. I speak out because I was an educator for 20 years before I became a senator. I speak out because as a senator I have been in a school almost every two weeks for the past 10 years and have seen the inequality so many children confront. I have also seen how much difference a good school and a good teacher can make for a child."

—Senator Wellstone at Teachers College, Columbia University, March 31, 2000

[KUDOS TO . . .]

...MEA-MFT—the merged Montana affiliate of NEA and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT)—for spearheading Stand Up For Education (SUFE), a statewide coalition. Through pre-election radio spots and billboards, SUFE urged voters to ask political candidates the "tough" questions on educational issues such as funding, teacher recruitment/retention, and affordable higher education.

Voters asked the right stuff and voted the right way. A record number of pro-public education candidates—including 11 MEA-MFT members—were elected to the Montana legislature on November 5.

...the Oregon Education Association for its victory in the battle for an honest ballot initiative system. In a civil lawsuit initiated by OEA and AFT-Oregon, a jury has upheld three fraud and racketeering charges against Oregon Taxpayers United (OTU) and related organizations, and awarded the unions damages totaling $842,000. Because the racketeering charges were proven, under statute, the damages will be automatically tripled to just over $2.52 million.

OTU and its allied groups—run by less-government, less-tax crusader Bill Sizemore—have put education- and union-bashing initiatives on the ballot, including measures tying teacher pay to student test scores and banning payroll deduction for everything from union dues to charitable donations.

The jury found that the defendants forged signatures on initiative petition statements of sponsorship for potential ballot measures, forged signatures on initiative petitions used to qualify measures for a ballot, and filed false state and federal contribution and expenditure reports.

...the Washington Education Association, for standing up to the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, an anti-public education, anti-union think tank that falsely charged NEA with ignoring an EFF lawsuit directed against NEA support of ballot Initiative 732. Approved by Washington voters in 2000, this measure guarantees annual cost-of-living raises for public school employees.

Recently, Washington courts overturned a default judgment against NEA and dismissed the EFF suit, before finally reminding EFF that "the courtroom is not a ballgame" and ordering the group to pay fines and reimburse NEA for legal costs. "It is clear to me," wrote Thurston County Superior Court Judge Daniel J. Berschauer, "that if [EFF] was operating with good faith, they would have never done what they did in this case..."

...the 235-member Maple Heights (Ohio) Education Association, for bargaining a new contract in November after a tough nine-week strike. Maple Heights teachers faced daunting odds, including 200 teacher/strikebreakers paid $165 a day, to improve both pay and professional respect—undermined by punitive teacher drug testing and sick leave documentation requirements, high class sizes, and the administration's frequent failure to provide substitute teachers.

MHEA members stayed united and educated themselves and the community on the issues at stake. They won the backing of parents, local politicians, and their Congresswoman, and even earned supportive editorials in the Cleveland *Plain Dealer.*

Among other things, the new Maple Heights agreement provides a 3 percent pay increase for this year and 3.5 percent next year, and requires "just cause" for discipline, seniority rights for layoff and recall, and payment for emergency work during the duty-free lunch period.

Under the contract, elementary art, P.E., and music teachers can't be removed from regular assignments to sub for other teachers. The pact also improves sick leave, insurance, and tuition reimbursement benefits.

Improving Struggling Schools—

Pennsylvania NEA members grapple with a state school 'improvement' law that mirrors ESEA. The lessons: take risks, but take care of your *rights.*

Under Act 16—ironically labeled the Education Empowerment Act—Pennsylvania state officials can cite struggling public school systems for their "history of poor test performance," place them under external control, send them minimal improvement grants, and then subject them to every painful penalty from "reconstitution" to partial privatization.

Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) officials say that Act 16, passed in 2000, strongly resembles the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) through its narrow focus on standardized testing, its escalating penalties for failure to raise test scores, and its underfunding of a very worthy objective: improved academic achievement for *all* students.

Act 16 and ESEA differ in one key aspect: the former focuses on whole districts, the latter on individual schools. That aside, charges PSEA staffer Bob Brown, the two laws are "punitive and so close to being the same it's scary."

While history will judge if ESEA meets its promise of "no child left behind," the recent history of Act 16 offers NEA and its state affiliates strong reasons to negotiate strong educator and student protections in ESEA implementation.

Here's how two PSEA affiliates are grappling with this difficult state law:

■ **Chester Upland: Edison Schools Make a Mess.** In 2000, an appointed Act 16 "control board" running the struggling Chester Upland district contracted with a private firm, Edison Schools, to run 9 of 10 schools, right down to the level of assistant principal.

While expressing misgivings over privatization, the 491-member Chester Upland Education Association (CUEA) negotiated employee and union security rights with the district and initially supported the Edison experiment as the schools' best immediate hope for improvement.

But today, CUEA members are waging a community-wide campaign to end the annual Edison contract because state scores—ESEA's quality gauge—in the nine Edison-run schools actually *declined* from October 2001 to April 2002.

Under Edison management, "we believe that the environment for teaching and learning has deteriorated," says CUEA President Gloria Zoranksi. The company, she charges, has "underdelivered" on many promises, from professional development to computers, while eliminating non-teaching support positions and closing Chester Upland's alternative school—returning disruptive students to the classroom, some directly from incarceration.

"Suspensions, truancy, and other problems related to discipline have skyrocketed," says Zoranski, "while students who want to learn are frustrated."

"When I walk around Harrisburg school buildings, I sense a better teacher attitude and see more things going on in the classroom."

—Rich Askey, President
Harrisburg Education Association

■ **Harrisburg: Cooperation Makes a Difference.** Despite the challenges of Act 16, the 650-member Harrisburg Education Association (HEA) is proving that a struggling district *can* make progress under an ESEA-type law. The right formula, says elementary music teacher and HEA President Rich Askey, is "a balance of labor-management cooperation and protection of teacher rights."

Left to right: Harrisburg preschoolers Miracle Brooks, Jasmine Dejesus, and Shakira Burch are taught in a unique program that pairs district teachers with Head Start staffers.

Harrisburg, the state's lowest-scoring district when it was "designated" by Act 16 for state takeover, has had some lucky breaks. The state placed the system under the direct control of Mayor Stephen Reed, a strong supporter of teacher-administrator cooperation and a rallier of business and community support for the city's schools.

Initial results: Student retention is up, the high school has seen a 20 percent enrollment increase, facilities are improving, and business and foundation grants are flowing into the district.

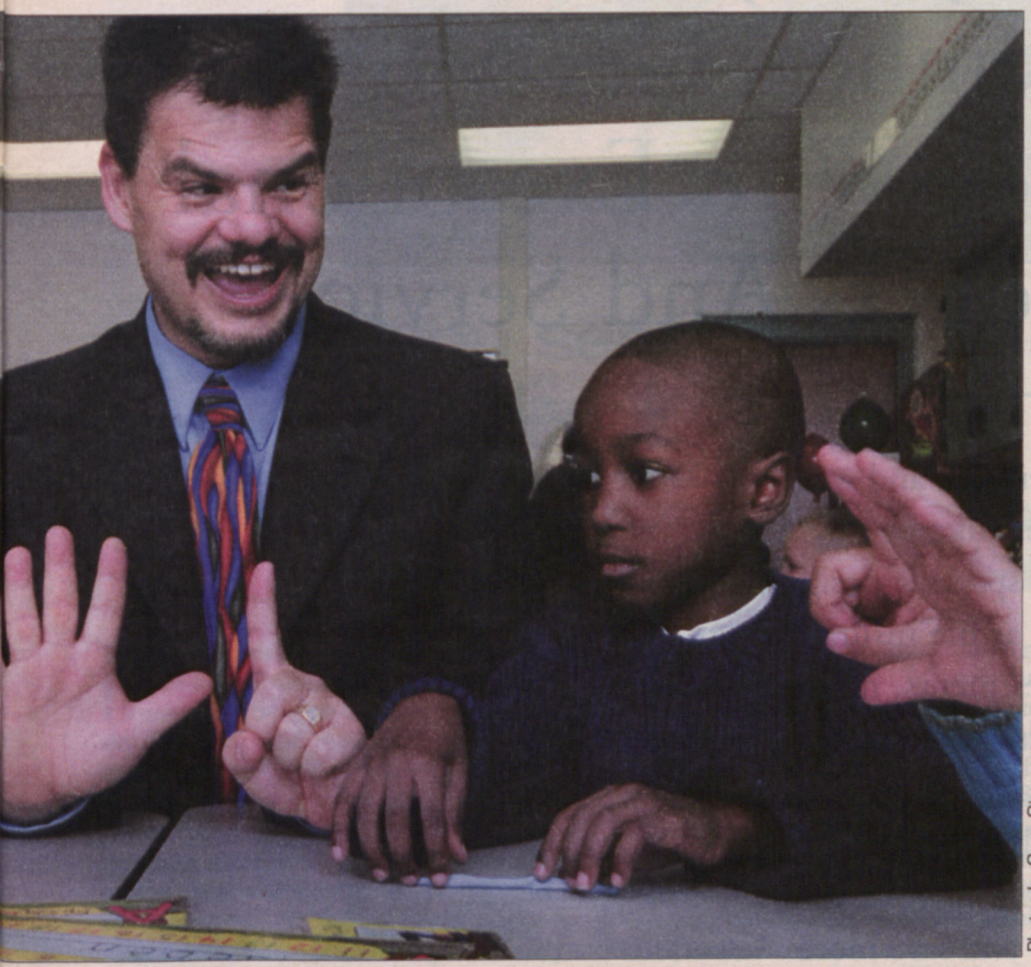
Reed ensured that HEA members had a voice in the hiring process for a new superintendent. As a result, Harrisburg schools are now led by Gerald Kohn, an advocate of labor-management harmony who, like the mayor, publicly declares that teachers should be "honored" and supported, not blamed for schools' troubles.

In one short year, Kohn and his teacher partners have put Harrisburg on the path to real improvement.

The district has a new K-3 literacy campaign, a unique preschool program that pairs district teachers with Head Start staffers, two effective district truancy centers, and professional development that is relevant to teacher and program needs—including a graduate course in literacy now taught to K-3 teachers (on paid early-release time) by the University of Pennsylvania.

"When I walk around the buildings, I sense a better teacher attitude and see more things going on in the class-

-In Spite of the Law



Photos by Sean Simmers

Harrisburg Education Association President Rich Askey adds up ways to help struggling schools: "teamwork, effort, caring about kids, and money—don't forget the money."

room," reports Askey with deep pride.

The high school's enrollment is up because "students communicate to parents this change in attitude," points out Superintendent Kohn. "Teachers are supported and now have *hope* rather than despair."

Askey stresses that the cooperation is bolstered by a collective bargaining agreement that includes strong language on teacher transfers and professional development and guarantees union representation and discipline only for "just cause."

"We've got a good contract, we're not afraid to defend that contract, and we're not afraid to file grievances if needed and to quickly bring about resolutions of concerns," Askey says. "We've also got a good [Association] Rep Council. We teach and support our reps, to ensure our contract is kept strong."

HEA "represents teachers in the best way—what's best for children and teachers *together*," says Kohn. "I must credit the HEA president and executive committee for taking a leap of faith [to work with me]. It's paid off for all."

Now there's no place for Harrisburg to go but up. It takes awhile to change a culture, Askey says, but genuine school improvement can happen through "teamwork, effort, caring about kids, and money—don't forget the money." ✔

—Dave Winans

For more, contact HEA President Rich Askey at rwaskey@comcast.net.

ESEA: Another Reason To Expand Bargaining Rights

If there's a lesson to be learned from Pennsylvania NEA members' experience with Act 16, an ESEA-type school improvement law, it's that "the time to be concerned about preserving educators' rights and voice is *now*, not a couple of years down the road, when the first wave of struggling, resource-starved schools are labeled as 'low performing,'" says Don Morabito, a staffer in NEA's Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy unit.

While each state will set its own bar for what constitutes "adequate yearly progress" under ESEA, many NEA affiliates aren't waiting for adverse consequences. Driven by its grueling experience with Act 16 penalties in struggling districts—everything from extended work schedules to charter school conversions—the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) is advising local affiliates to bargain over the "impact" of these actions on pay, hours, and working conditions.

And NEA is advising all affiliates to negotiate through either collective bargaining or "other processes of bilateral decision making" over a broad array of ESEA-related issues, such as "just cause" for discipline, educator accountability, professional development, transfers, outside service providers, paraeducator duties, school calendars and overtime protections, mentoring, and public disclosure of teacher qualifications.

Granted, basic education policy issues are still non-negotiable in many, many districts, due to court or arbitration decisions or weak or non-existent state bargaining laws. But because of ESEA, "the question of expansion of the legal scope of bargaining will become ever more critical," stresses Morabito.

ESEA may open up more opportunities for collaborative bargaining, over issues such as accountability, testing, and teacher quality. "In this kind of process, legal 'scope' is never an issue—the parties just raise an issue and ask, 'How do we solve this?'" says Tim Fitzgerald, an NEA bargaining consultant.

Whatever the path to joint decision making, "we need to talk about who else is responsible for test scores," concludes PSEA staffer Bob Brown. "We need to ensure that parents, the community, and school districts share responsibility with teachers and education support professionals for student achievement. Parents need to provide a nice place for their kids to do homework, and there needs to be a reason for students to want to come to school and take those tests!" ✔

—D.W.

[YOUR DUES DID IT]

An NEA Conference Hastens Change in Harrisburg

Labor-management cooperation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, got a jump start last spring when a team of teachers and administrators attended NEA's 2002 Challenge of Change Conference.

This unique gathering, held annually in Colorado Springs, brings together teams of school stakeholders—such as Association members and staff, school board members, administrators, and community folks—to examine "how to change by doing things differently," says NEA Training and Organizational Development staffer Sarah Root.

The key to this conference: lots of team time to work together. Team members work together on a specific question or a project they bring along. Some teams have attended for a number of years. This is their retreat time.

"This event was instrumental in creating the strong relationship we now have between teachers and administrators," says Harrisburg Education Association President Rich Askey. "NEA accorded us the support, the time, and the environment to have in-depth, real conversations and to meld as a team."

So strong is this relationship that joint Harrisburg teams now attend NEA's annual Priority Schools Conference, focused on turning around struggling schools.

The next NEA Challenge of Change Conference will be held on March 21-25. The deadline for team registrations is January 30. For more information, contact Dan Hand at 202/822-7107 or at dhand@nea.org. ✔

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CONT0103

Andy Powell

"Do you serve the kids better when you live in the community?"

yes

I have lived within a block of my school and even on campus at a boarding school, but I currently live 20 miles from work. So I have taught in both situations. I feel teachers definitely serve the kids better when they live in the community.

Living close to the school, a teacher can attend home ball games, go to band concerts and plays, work on homecoming activities and school dances, decorate the classroom, or do lesson plans without the additional effort of having to drive for miles.

One sees the students in the community more frequently, gets to know the families better, participates in local organizations, and often spends time with students in non-school activities.

When I lived close to or on campus, I really got to know my students. Teenagers, particularly, need adults whom they can trust. Sometimes they have problems to discuss, and in a class of 30 to 35 students, it is frequently difficult to find the time to lend an ear.

However, if a teacher lives in the community, there are more opportunities. I have always enjoyed visiting students' homes, going to their places of worship, and being involved in community activities.

I have taught youth classes at church and have taken students on outings. To me, teaching is not just an 8 to 3 job. It provides the opportunity to help young people grow and mature not only during school hours, but at other times as well.

But now I live far away. When I get home, I am too tired to turn around and go back to school. If I forget something in the classroom or want to drop by school to do a little extra work, it is too long a drive so I refrain from doing so.

I miss going to more activities and sometimes feel a bit guilty because I am not there to cheer on a hard-working student. I know there are many teachers who want their privacy, but I have always enjoyed my students and miss seeing them outside of school as I did when I lived closer. ✔

MARJORIE RIOS teaches Spanish at Livingston Academy, a public high school in Livingston, Tennessee. She is active in extracurricular activities despite living 20 miles from school. She has taught for 31 years in Costa Rica, Florida, and Tennessee.

no

You do not serve students better when you live in the community, nor is the teacher better off.

Having a neighbor or family friend for a teacher puts tremendous pressure on the student, even if that student is doing well. If there are problems, they can break friendships. It happened to me.

For three years, I taught in a small, rural district 25 miles from my home. Almost all the other teachers also lived some distance away. One who lived nearby lamented her situation every day. She could not go anywhere without seeing students or parents.

Then I started teaching one mile from my home in a school where the children of many friends and neighbors were students. At times, it was worse than awful during my six years there. I was relieved to move on to teaching in a university.

I vividly remember one painful episode. A neighborhood boy became my student in sixth grade. His parents had been good friends of mine since before he was born. Little Johnny Smith (I'll call him) was a child who made you smile: bright, energetic, and athletic. As so often happens in middle school, his social life became all-encompassing. Homework and paying attention in school went by the wayside. Parent contact was a must. I sent a low-key note stating the problem.

So began a non-relationship with my friend, his mother. In the grocery store, she changed aisles or avoided eye contact. In other situations, coldness or avoidance were her chosen behaviors. I was being punished for the child's behavior! I believe she was embarrassed that she appeared to be failing in a major parental function. The irony was, I considered my two friends to be the best parents I knew, and Johnny Smith's acting like a typical middle school boy certainly didn't lessen that opinion.

I had him again in eighth grade when he was much more serious and purposeful, and the situation with his mother lightened up. I wish I could say we were fond friends again, but we became only long-time acquaintances.

Yes, it was nice being able to get to school quickly, but the convenience wasn't worth my loss! ✔

MARY ELLIN EISELE taught in Georgia for 10 years, followed by one year teaching education at Emory University in Atlanta and one year at the University of Georgia. An NEA-Retired member, she now lives in Cary, North Carolina.

What's Your Opinion?

Do you serve the kids better when you live in the community?
To vote, visit our website at www.nea.org/neatoday and see the results instantly.

Should we play down varsity sports?
The tally on this Debate question from the last issue of *NEA Today*:
41% Yes **59% No**

Should schools teach "intelligent design"? If you'd like to take part in this future Debate, send a brief note to Alain Jehlen, ajehlen@nea.org.

Big Legal Victories For Gay Students And Teachers

In groundbreaking rulings, the courts have sent school boards a clear message: Do more to stop harassment or pay the price.

Stephane Denis

Derek Henkle was spit on, beat up, and called names. Simply because he's gay. But the last straw for the Reno, Nevada, high school student came when classmates threw a rope around his neck and threatened to drag him behind a pick-up truck, just like James Byrd Jr.

Even after he transferred to two other high schools in the Washoe County School District, the harassment continued. His pleas for help were ignored, with one principal warning him to stop "acting like a fag."

So Derek Henkle dropped out and sued the school district, claiming that the district violated his constitutional rights by failing to stop the peer harassment.

Last August, the Washoe County School District agreed to pay Henkle $451,000 and to adopt sweeping changes to its policies and programs.

Peter Obstler, Henkle's attorney, proclaimed that the case "sends a message to the nation's schools that the harassment of gay and lesbian students will not be tolerated and that the failure to respond to that harassment has serious financial consequences for school districts. Simply put, 'If you bash, you pay.'"

Among other things, the district agreed to require students and staff to receive training about sexual harassment and intimidation.

In an equally important new development, several courts have recently ruled that school districts have to take action to stop students from harassing teachers because of their sexual orientation.

Last August, for example, a federal district court in New York held that the Comsewogue School District violated the constitutional rights of Joan Lovell, a lesbian teacher, by "failing to take reasonable measures to prevent students from harassing her due to her homosexuality."

Lovell alleged that students called her "dyke" and "disgusting" and that two female students began to hug each other when they saw her in the hall. When Lovell complained to her principal, Joseph Rella, he failed to punish the students or take any other remedial action.

So Lovell sued both her school district and Rella, claiming a violation of her right to "equal protection" under the federal Constitution. She argued that school officials suspended students for acts of racial harassment, but did nothing to the students who called her "dyke."

The court agreed, ruling that it is "well-established that governmental discrimination against homosexuals...violate[s] the equal protection clause."

In Wisconsin, however, a teacher had less success in his lawsuit against the Hamilton School District. Tommy Schroeder claimed that school officials failed to do enough to stop the harassment he suffered because of his sexual orientation.

He alleged that students called him "queer" and "faggot" in the hallways and on bus duty and wrote graffiti in the bathroom identifying him as a "faggot." He also maintained that students and parents made anonymous, harassing phone calls to his home.

District officials claimed that they punished the offending students whenever they could be identified. But Schroeder argued that the school administration should have done more—namely, they should have required all students and staff to attend workshops on sexual orientation discrimination.

In a ruling last March, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals rejected that argument. Although agreeing that school officials had a legal obligation to take reasonable steps to stop the harassment of Schroeder, the court held that they did enough by punishing the known harassers and had no duty to implement diversity training as Schroeder had requested.

In California last August, a teacher won a $1.1 million settlement from the San Leandro Unified School District, which had disciplined him for speaking to his students about equality and respect for gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons.

Two parents had accused high school teacher Karl Debro of attempting to "brainwash" his students and make them "become gay." In response, school officials reprimanded Debro, who is married with children.

Debro sued, claiming a violation of his free speech rights and his obligation under California law to combat all forms of bias, including homophobia.

On August 8, 2002, a jury awarded Debro $500,000 for emotional distress. On the eve of the punitive damages phase of the trial, the school district settled the case for $1,155,000.

The school district also agreed to remove the reprimand memos from Debro's file and institute a comprehensive training program on diversity for students and staff.

A new NEA booklet, "Know Your Rights: Legal Protection for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Education Employees," summarizes recent legal developments and offers practical advice for persons who believe they have been the victim of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identification. The booklet is posted at www.owl.org and copies will be mailed to NEA state affiliates. Limited numbers of complimentary copies are available from NEA Human and Civil Rights (202/822-7700). ✔

—Michael D. Simpson
NEA Office of General Counsel

Florida Voucher Program Struck Down

In a blow to voucher proponents, a circuit court judge last August declared that Florida's voucher program violates the state constitution's ban on the use of public money to aid religious institutions.

The decision was announced just six weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court rejected NEA's arguments that the Cleveland voucher program violates the federal constitution's Establishment Clause.

But Leon County Circuit Judge P. Kevin Davey concluded that the pertinent clause of the Florida constitution goes further, providing that, "No revenue of the state...shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church...or any sectarian institution." This language, Judge Davey wrote, "is clear and unambiguous. There is scant room for interpretation or parsing."

The state has appealed the ruling, and the court has allowed the voucher program to continue pending the appeal. The court, however, ordered the state to post a $2.5 million dollar bond to repay adversely affected public schools if the lower court decision is upheld on appeal.

A decision is not expected until sometime in 2003. NEA is sponsoring the litigation. ✔

—M.D.S.

Credentials Count

What makes a good teacher? The debate rages about what kinds of training and credentials translate into effectiveness in the classroom.

Susan Sanford

Education Secretary Rod Paige stirred a hornet's nest recently when he called for revamping the system for licensing teachers. Dismissing education coursework mandates as "burdensome," Paige and others called for new paths for college graduates to enter classrooms without traditional preparation. Coming on the heels of a new federal mandate for teacher quality, Paige's comments rekindled a debate over what qualifications teachers need to serve students successfully. This month's Scoop *separates the rhetoric from the research.*

What is Secretary Paige's position?

In delivering his first annual report on teacher quality to Congress, Paige asserted that "state certification systems allow into the classroom too many teachers who lack solid content knowledge of the subjects they will teach." Instead, certification standards are overloaded with required courses in pedagogy that "act as an unnecessary barrier for those wishing to pursue a teaching career," he argued.

The debate over certification requirements is particularly important because the massive new Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), passed last year, mandates that by the end of the 2005-06 school year, all teachers of core academic subjects must be "highly qualified," and all teachers will have to be fully certified (in other words, not working under an emergency or temporary waiver).

Under ESEA, new elementary teachers must have a bachelor's degree and pass a state test to demonstrate their knowledge of reading and other areas of the basic curriculum. New middle and secondary teachers must have a bachelor's degree and demonstrate competency in each subject taught. This demonstration can take the form of passing a state test, completing an academic major, or other options. States are now developing their responses to the teacher quality mandate, and their decisions will affect all teachers in some way. Paige favors requiring less preparation for teacher candidates in education methods.

What does research say about the relationship between teachers' credentials and training and their effectiveness in the classroom?

Abundant evidence exists that professional training and credentials matter. A new synthesis of research by James Stronge of the College of William and Mary states that:

- The proportion of well-qualified and certified teachers within a state is one of the most consistent predictors of student test scores in reading and math.
- Teachers with traditional education preparation are better able to recognize individual student differences; those without education coursework frequently have difficulties with classroom management, student motivation, and using specific teaching strategies.

Further, the notion that graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs are weak in subject matter is unfounded. Art Wise, president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), cites a landmark study by the Educational Testing Service of scores on its Praxis II exam, which 23 states used to measure the content knowledge of teachers seeking certification. Of 270,000 candidates tested, 91 percent of graduates from NCATE-accredited institutions passed the content exam, compared with 73 percent of candidates who did not study teacher preparation.

What about teachers who enter the field via alternative programs?

Alternative programs that place people in classrooms before they are fully certified vary considerably, and the research on their effects is scanty.

A new study published in the electronic journal *Education Policy Analysis Archives* examined nearly 300 recently hired primary teachers, comparing those who had regular certification with those who were "undercertified" (teaching under emergency, temporary, or provisional certificates).

According to study authors Ildiko Laczko-Kerr and David Berliner, students of the certified teachers achieved significantly better than the students with undercertified teachers in the subjects measured (reading, language, and mathematics). How much better? Students of undercertified teachers—including some who were in the highly touted Teach for America program—showed about 20 percent less growth per year.

Experts also are concerned about the preponderance of undercertified teachers in poor schools. Poor and minority students are two to three times more likely than students in wealthier districts to be taught by unlicensed, inexperienced teachers. All students deserve a certified teacher and the boost that will bring to their achievement.

If you're already certified, how does the ongoing debate affect you?

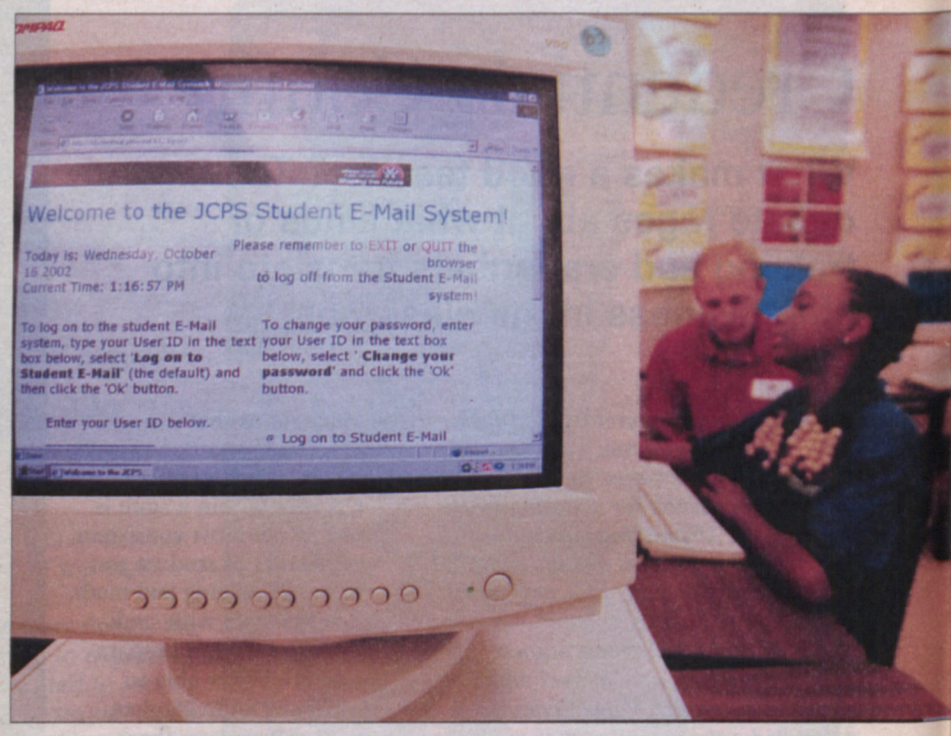
Teachers stand very little chance of improving their salaries and working conditions if policymakers and the public accept the idea that teaching requires little more than enthusiasm, knowledge of a subject, and a dollop of coaching or night courses. NEA President Reg Weaver notes, "The sooner we begin treating teachers as respected professionals, the sooner we will attract and retain quality teachers. Gimmicks, short cuts, and lowering standards are not the answer. Respect, funding, and support for the teaching profession will put a quality teacher in every classroom." ✔

—John O'Neil

For More:

- NEA provides a helpful summary of new federal provisions for teacher quality at www.nea.org/esea.
- To learn more about effective teacher preparation, visit the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education homepage at www.ncate.org.
- The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future has developed criteria it urges states to use as they define teacher quality. For more, go to www.nctaf.org.
- Read Laczko-Kerr and Berliner's articles in the *Education Policy Analysis Archives* at http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n37.html.
- See James Stronge's synthesis of research in *Qualities of Effective Teachers*, available through the website of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development at www.ascd.org/framebooks.html.

You've Got Mail


Welcome to the JCPS Student E-Mail System!
Today is: Wednesday, October 16 2002
Current Time: 1:16:57 PM
Please remember to EXIT or QUIT the browser to log off from the Student E-Mail system!
To log on to the student E-Mail system, type your User ID in the text box below, select 'Log on to Student E-Mail' (the default) and then click the 'Ok' button.
To change your password, enter your User ID in the text box below, select 'Change your password' and click the 'Ok' button.
Enter your User ID below.
Log on to Student E-Mail

A student at Farnsley Middle School in Louisville, Kentucky, meets with her e-mail mentor from a local university to talk about her writing essay.

Imagine this: You've got 400 language arts essays to grade—and it's all on you. So you enlist the help of a local university education professor, who turns loose her very bright preservice teachers to help you guide your students through the fixing and the polishing of their literary gems.

They do this mainly through e-mail because your school's technology coordinator thinks this is a *very* cool thing—and besides, she gets to train the students in the peculiar ways of the "business e-mail," not to mention the legal and ethical uses of the Internet.

Pul-leeze, you say?

Trust us, it's not fantasy. This so-called e-mentoring project is happening, and the NEA members who dreamed up the idea say it's nobody's gimmick. "It's working," gloats Chris Burba, the seventh-grade language arts teacher at Farnsley Middle School in Louisville, Kentucky, "and beautifully."

It was Burba who a year ago began brainstorming with Deborah Schweitzer, the technology coordinator for the Jefferson County Public Schools, to come up with creative ways to use local university faculty in the classroom. The two also wanted to capitalize on a districtwide initiative that gave e-mail accounts to every student in grades 5-12.

So Schweitzer, who also happened to be teaching across the river at Indiana University Southeast, contacted Susan Ridout, a professor in the education school there. Ridout, who teaches language arts and reading methods, leapt at the idea of a mentoring project and eagerly assigned each of her 22 students to five Farnsley students. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Now, through regular e-mail exchanges and a handful of face-to-face meetings, mentors spend several hours each week urging their young charges to think critically about their work, gently offering suggestions, and overseeing revisions, all the while conferring with Burba on their progress.

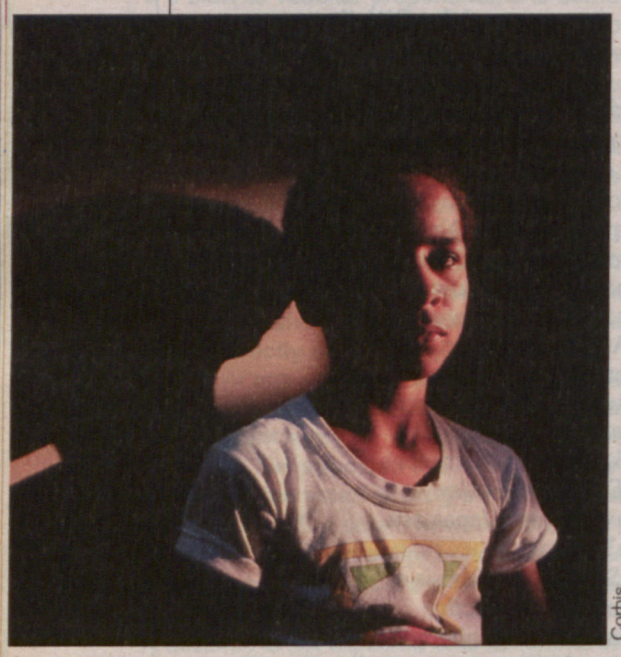
The arrangement has been magic. The seventh graders, who must complete a state-required writing portfolio—five essays in four genres—now get more focused attention from Burba than they ever did, and many have been jolted from their writing doldrums. "Now when they send out an e-mail to their mentor," says Burba, "they want a response in five minutes! Their attitudes about writing have been totally turned around."

Schweitzer, meanwhile, has found an exciting, real-life forum for teaching rules about e-mailing and the Internet (for instance, don't give out your password, don't say "whatsup" to your mentor). And the mentors, says Ridout, get the benefit of a "powerful" and invaluable interaction with students—and seasoned teachers, too.

Schweitzer says word is now spreading to other teachers, who are establishing college relationships of their own and, not surprisingly, are tapping her for help. "The whole thing just went, 'Boom!'" she says. "It's so exciting."

—Marilyn Milloy

For more: Contact Deborah Schweitzer at dschwei1@jefferson.k12.ky.us or Chris Burba at cburba1@jefferson.k12.ky.us.



Corbis

The achievement gap that stratifies students by race and income begins before kids start school, a new report has found.

When Poverty Cripples

For years educators have known that kids from poor families start school on shakier academic ground than kids from more well-to-do families. Now, a detailed report confirms it—and the news is bleaker than even some teachers may have thought.

Called *Inequality at the Starting Gate,* the report by the Economic Policy Institute, a Washington, D.C. think tank, found that children in the bottom fifth economic bracket scored 60 percent lower in math and reading upon entering kindergarten than children from the highest bracket. Worse, these same poor children—most of whom are minorities—start their education at "consistently" lower-quality schools that are already stymied by a lack of resources, large classes, and inexperienced teachers.

"This reinforces the inequalities that develop even before children reach school age," the report says.

The new research, which uses government data from an ongoing national study of 16,000 children who started kindergarten in 1998, found that economic and racial disparities run deep. For example, only 20 percent of poor children entering kindergarten had computers in their homes compared with 85 percent of students at the top income scale. Poor families owned an average of just 38 books, while families at the top owned 108.

Researchers say the findings buttress long-standing arguments for more high-quality preschools—and for policies that confront head-on the inequality of resources in public schools.

—Jozen Cummings

For more: To get a copy of the report, call 800/374-4844 or go to www.epinet.org.

ESPs: All That (And More)

Quick! Who makes up the fastest-growing constituency of NEA? Time's up. It's the education support professionals (ESPs), of course. Last year alone, 12,000 new ESP members joined NEA, bringing the total to nearly 350,000—just one of many reasons a new department has been created at national headquarters. Called ESP Quality, the department was established last September.

"What this means," says Al Perez, director of the new department, "is that ESPs are part of the education family—not stepsisters or brothers, but truly part of the family."

So exactly how will this status boost affect members? For starters, says Perez, it means higher visibility, more staff resources, and more money for ESP advocacy and professional development programs. Additionally, issues of importance to ESP members—compensation, health insurance, and bargaining, for example—now automatically get integrated into discussions involving the rest of the NEA membership. And with a new ESP representative on the NEA Executive Board, Iona Holloway, those issues are bound to stay centerstage.

Cara Elmore, one of ESP Quality's organizational specialists, says the department is already in gear, putting together an ESP professional development "action guide" for staff, affiliates, and trainers. "They will be able to use it to create more effective professional development sessions for members interested in job enhancement and career movement," she says. "It will really speak to our members' diverse needs. And it'll help them learn how to apply their skills not just professionally, but in their personal lives."

Elmore says it's all quite exciting. "When you talk about establishing more public confidence in our schools, you can't do that without ESP members," she says. "The schools function because there's a maintenance person there, a bus driver, a cafeteria worker, a security guard....They are the people who jump-start the school day.

"And you know what?" Elmore adds with a smile, "They do it because they love the kids. They certainly don't do it for the money."

—M.M.

For more: To find out how ESP Quality is helping you, e-mail: espsupport@nea.org, call 202/822-7131, or go to www.nea.org/esp.

Pat McDonagh

Mary Thelene

Education support professionals play a critical role in NEA and in public education. Recently the Association has established a new department called ESP Quality, which will give heightened attention to the many issues ESPs face.

American Indian Wonders—by Web

Trying to think of fresh, new ways to capture the spirit of American Indian history and culture while you teach? Well, here's something fun.

The Smithsonian's American Art Museum has created an interactive website, called "Campfire Stories with George Catlin," designed especially for educators and students. Geared to grades 5-12, the website explores the life and works of that great experimental 19th-century artist who made his mark painting American Indian tribes, ceremonies, customs, and landscapes. Many of those paintings—now on exhibit in the Renwick Gallery of the museum—can be viewed on the site, and teachers and staff can access a host of "live" resources, including audio stories, interviews, and interactive maps that reach beyond the paintings to tell the history of a people.

"We wanted to assemble a website that exposes young people to the vigorous, living culture of Native Americans and help them link the past with the present," says Faye Powe, the museum's public program coordinator.

The website incorporates Catlin's writings and paintings into a collage of riveting tales. It features four virtual campfire discussions that allow students to listen to stories and view paintings about Catlin's explorations in the 1830s and about American Indian leaders and ancestral lands and the Western landscape.

Noted historians, experts, and prominent American Indians narrate each section. Through each campfire discussion, students get to discover American Indian history up close and personal and learn how historical events continue to impact American Indians today. Teachers, meanwhile, get access to comprehensive lesson plans and in-class activities that explore a wide range of topics, from history and geography to visual arts and science. The good news: All the subject material has been developed to meet national curricula teaching standards.

"Our goal is to insert Native American history into American schools in a very respectful way," Powe says. "We want students to see how Native Americans have overcome challenges and have thrived as a marvelous and resilient people."

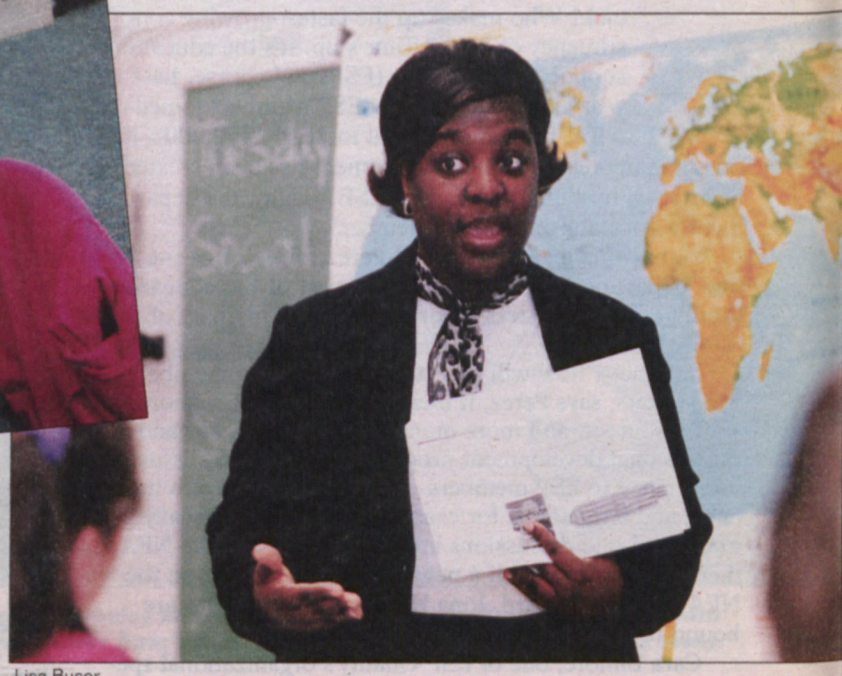
—Leah Lakins

For more: Visit the Catlin website at http://CatlinClassroom.si.edu or to schedule a visit to the Catlin Exhibit, now on display until January 19, 2003, call 202/275-1693.

Noted works like this one by artist George Catlin can be seen on a new interactive Smithsonian website created just for educators and their students.

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Chris Seward



Lisa Buser

Meeting Those Special Needs

Students with disabilities need resources and support—and so do their teachers.

When Drew Houlihan entered his classroom his first year of teaching, he thought he was prepared to meet the needs of all his students. He was assigned a part-time classroom assistant and he had only 23 students in his class.

But soon after his first week, "My confidence dropped and my vision for my classroom had to be adjusted," says Houlihan, a second-grade teacher at A.B. Combs Leadership Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina. "Eight of my students received special education services and were pulled out of my classroom at least four days a week. I needed to keep updated on my students' progress, and I wanted to collaborate on strategies."

Adequate time for planning and collaboration is critical when working with special needs students. All classroom teachers—but beginning teachers especially—need time to adapt materials for students who learn differently, to communicate with parents about student progress, and to collaborate with other staff members about appropriate strategies.

Houlihan was fortunate to work in a school that emphasized staff collaboration. But not all teachers are that lucky. A recent study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found that teachers' confidence in working with students with disabilities often depends on their relationships with their schools' special education teachers. While most teachers felt they received the support they needed, more than one-third reported receiving little help. (You can check out the study at www.spense.org/Results.html.)

One of the first things new teachers should do is meet with the special educators in their schools, including related service providers such as speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, and school nurses. "Once they realize you're open to suggestions, they likely will share loads of materials and resources with you," says Houlihan.

Beginning special education teachers need to reach out to their colleagues as well, says Rhonda Thompson, a special education teacher at Bolton High School in Millington, Tennessee. Thompson, who is in her fourth year of teaching, encourages other teachers to visit her classroom and observe class activities. Communication between the general education and special education teachers is key, she says.

"Be nice to everyone because your relationships with them reflect on how they relate to your students," says Thompson. "Don't just leave a problem child with a regular education teacher without providing any instruction on how to handle the child. You are the special education expert."

If you have a student in your class with special education

Two-Minute Tips

Extra Points Worksheet

To keep students occupied after they finish a test, I always attach a word search with words from my lessons. I tell students to complete the word search after they finish the test. This keeps all students engaged during the test period and allows slower students to work at their own pace. At the end of the period I collect all the papers. All the students don't finish the word searches, but I give them extra points for their efforts.

Michael Ciavola
Wallingford, Pennsylvania

Organized Lesson Plans

Keep a binder for each class you teach divided into sections for each day of the week. Have an additional section for make-up work. Write your lesson plans for each day on separate sheets of paper and place them in the appropriate sections. Also include any handouts you need. If students are absent, place the day's handouts in the make-up work section. You now have a record of everything you did during the year, along with the handouts you used.

Midori Wagner
Sonoma, California

Works 4 Me
nea's e-mail classroom tip of the week!

Have a great idea? You can pass along your tip to *NEA Today's* 2.7 million readers in one of five ways:

- By mail: *NEA Today*, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036
- By phone: 202/822-7201
- By fax: 202/822-7206
- By e-mail: Ideas@neatoday.nea.org
- Through the Web: www.nea.org/neatoday

Far left: Drew Houlihan advises other general education teachers to reach out to their special education colleagues.
Left: Rhonda Thompson often invites other teachers to observe her high school special education class.

needs, find out which of the student's goals and objectives you can address in your classroom. Also, ask about specific materials or equipment you should use and any accommodations for instruction and assessment the student might need. Special education teachers can explain ways to assess and grade the student's performance and provide information about completing necessary reports.

Sometimes new teachers feel unprepared to teach students with disabilities. "My student teaching experience was phenomenal, but looking back, it was very unrealistic at times," Houlihan admits.

Matching the classroom reality with the training preservice programs provide can be a challenge. The Department of Education study found that fewer than one-third of beginning teachers received any preservice preparation on collaborating with special education teachers. Although two-thirds learned how to manage student behavior, only slightly more than half received preparation on adapting instruction. Thompson encourages preservice teachers to keep the materials and resource guides they receive in college so they can draw on that research-based information in the classroom.

New teachers also can turn to many worthwhile websites and books designed to help teachers address the needs of students with disabilities. (See Resources below for suggestions.)

"When teachers have support and resources, they can be successful teaching all their students—including those with special needs," says Houlihan. ✔

—Patti Ralabate
NEA Student Achievement Department

RESOURCES

Meeting the Challenge

Meeting the Challenge: Special Education Tools that Work for All Kids **offers effective strategies and practical resources to help students overcome academic or behavior difficulties. The book includes specialized forms, checklists, rubrics, individualized education program (IEP) goals, behavior modification plans, and other resources teachers in general and special education can use in their classes. $15.95 from the NEA Professional Library. To order a copy or for more information, go to http://home.nea.org/books/.**

Surviving IDEA

The New IDEA Survival Guide **explains the most pressing concerns about IDEA '97, including discipline, developing IEPs, managing paperwork, and communicating with parents. $5.95 from the NEA Professional Library. To order a copy or for more information, go to http://home.nea.org/books/.**

Partner Up

The IDEA Partnerships, funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, involve more than 200 organizations committed to a common message about the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The group's website offers information to help teachers, administrators, families, and policy makers navigate the act. The site features articles, professional development resources, a question-and-answer section, and links to other useful websites. Visit www.ideapractices.org/.

Nobody Ever Told Me

Holding On

My first year of teaching I taught language arts in a middle school with double periods. During a break between periods, I heard a commotion at one end of my room. When I reached the group at the center of it, I found a student lying on the floor, having a seizure.

"What do I do?" I thought. I pushed back the panic and remembered two things I had heard about seizures: Don't let her head bang against the floor and don't let her swallow her tongue. I had no idea how to protect her tongue, but I could cradle her head, which I did.

It ended in less than 10 seconds. The student looked around, confused, and then jumped up. I sent her to the nurse with a friend, then calmed the other students. The experience was scary at the time, but the student was fine. She still laughs about it.

Anne Kaufman
Sixth-grade language arts teacher
Middletown, New Jersey

Got a Story?

E-mail kloschert@nea.org.

[DILEMMA]

What do you do if a child comes to school sick?

When I have a sick student on my bus, I try to comfort the child. If the child has an upset stomach, I offer the child a plastic bag in case of an accident. I notify my dispatcher and ask to have an administrator or school nurse meet my bus when I arrive at the school.

Mary Simmons
Bus driver
Grayson, Georgia

■ I send the child to the nurse and ask the nurse to contact the child's parents. If the child has to wait in my classroom for her parents, she rests her head on her desk or she relaxes in my rocking chair and reads a book.

Felicia Arnold
Third-grade teacher
Vernon, New Jersey

■ We call the parents and ask them to pick up their child. If we can't reach them, we call one of the emergency numbers on the child's card. The child stays in the health room until we reach someone who will pick up the child.

Jeanette J. Marquardt
Administrative receptionist
Bothell, Washington

■ The teacher and I make the child as comfortable as possible. Then we contact the child's parents. If we cannot reach a parent, and the situation is urgent, our social worker makes a home visit to see if anyone is home. If a responsible adult is home, then the social worker or the principal may take the child home.

Teresa Barbour
Teacher assistant
Johnston County, North Carolina

■ I send sick children to the nurse, who takes their temperature and holds them for pick up. If there is no contact number or it is not in service, the sick child remains with the nurse until the school day ends. If the child feels better, the child may return to class.

Kathy Hetrick
Special education resource teacher
Phoenix, Arizona

Got an Answer?

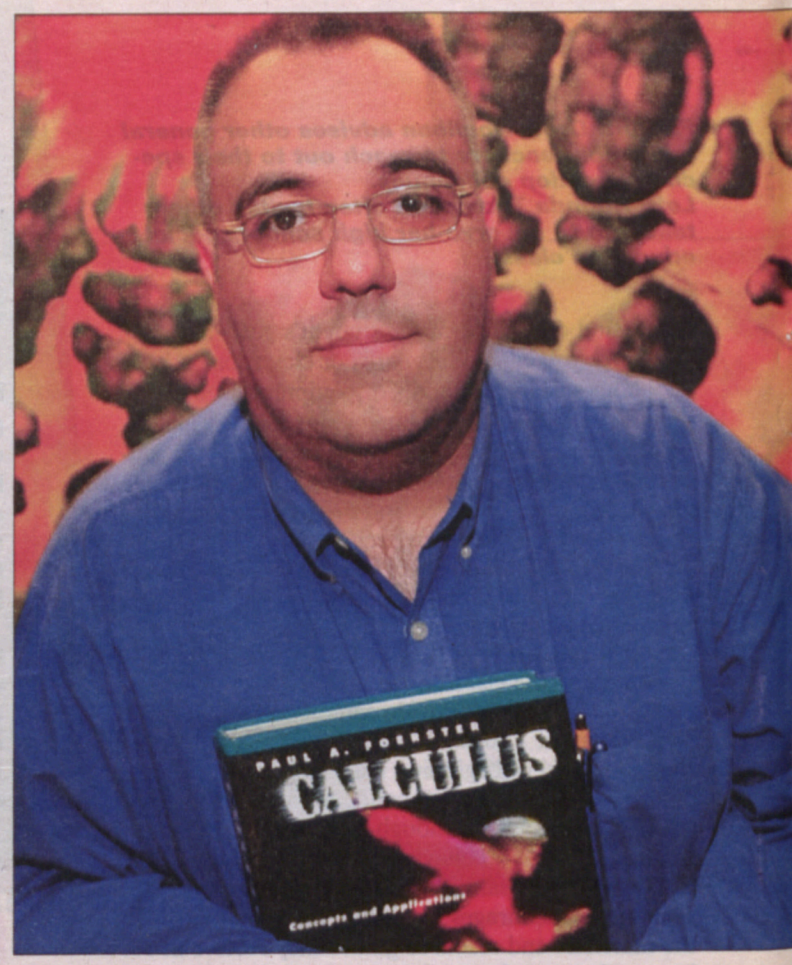
How do you help kids cope with test-taking anxiety?

E-mail your answer to dilemma2@list.nea.org. Or send by regular mail, or fax to 202/822-7206. Include your name, city, state, and job. If published, you will receive an *NEA Today* mug!

Ted Pitts

How To Advance Minority Students

An Escalante student takes on his teacher's mission in East L.A.



Roy Márquez (above and below on left) helps students follow his own path through AP calculus to rewarding careers.

In 1988, the movie *Stand and Deliver* told the story of Jaime Escalante's dramatic success in teaching calculus to low-income, Hispanic students at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles.

But there was a lot more to Escalante's formula than the charisma and determination shown in the film, according to NEA member Roy Márquez, who teaches calculus at Garfield today.

Márquez should know—he was in Escalante's original break-through class of 1982, the class that scored so high on the Advanced Placement test, Educational Testing Service didn't believe them and made many of the students (not Márquez) take the test again.

Just as the high numbers of minority students in special education are attracting attention (see cover story on page 8), so are the low numbers in programs like the College Board's Advanced Placement that boost students toward success in college and good jobs.

The College Board reports 4.9 percent of AP test takers last year were African-American. That's up from 4.3 percent in 1998, but African-American students make up 17.2 percent of the total student population according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Hispanic students are 15.6 percent of all students. Their share of AP test takers has risen from 8.6 percent in 1998 to 10.7 percent in 2002.

Educators all over the country are trying to figure out how to improve those numbers, and Escalante's program is a good place to start.

"It's not as simple an equation as the film and some reactionary politicians set it out to be," Márquez says. "The impression was that all you need is the desire—'ganas' in Spanish. That trivializes the challenges of education. It's much more complex. There are issues of resources at different schools, preparation of teachers, and kids coming to school ready or not ready to learn based on their home environment."

The film showed students coming into Escalante's calculus class totally unprepared and, by dint of superior effort, flying through the AP test in a few short months. Actually, says Márquez, his class had already studied advanced math for several years. Escalante led the development of a multi-year series of high-level classes, and calculus was only the culmination.

A major focus of Márquez's efforts today is to rebuild that system, working with other math teachers in the high school and even in the feeder schools to mesh their curricula and raise standards.

Good preparation involves teaching students to think, "moving away from drill and kill to more open-ended explorations," Márquez says. "Drill is vital, but not to the exclusion of critical thinking."

Learning calculus without enough preparation is a gargantuan task. But it's a task Márquez and his students are taking on.

Márquez tells his classes they should plan on two-and-a-half hours of homework every night, plus more work outside the normal school calendar. Garfield is on a year-round, four-months-on, two-months-off schedule. For the first month of the break, Márquez's classes come to school two hours every day.

So two essential ingredients in a successful advanced program are: a series of rigorous courses and incredibly hard work.

What else is in Márquez's recipe?

- **Parent support**—"That doesn't mean parents coming to school to photocopy for me," he explains. "It means sending me their kids ready to learn. Some of it is basic: They cannot be hungry. They have to feel secure. They need a place to study at home.

"But beyond that, the parents need to create a situation where literacy and thinking and education are valued, which in our society, for the most part, is not what's going on."

- **Class size**—"It really matters," says Márquez. "I've taught as few as 15 and as many as 37, and 37 was pretty unmanageable." His big classes don't have discipline problems, but the level of teacher-student interaction required for a challenging educational experience is hard to achieve with huge classes. Márquez thinks 20 is a good number.
- **A skillful teacher who is serious about high standards**—"You have to expect a lot, and they have to perceive that you genuinely care that they do well," says Márquez. "That was possibly Escalante's strength, more than pedagogy. It was that sense of genuine caring for the success or failure of his students."

Márquez says Garfield's AP program now involves between 5 and 10 percent of the students. There are 18 AP courses, taught by about 20 teachers.

The College Board didn't pay much

Bob Riha Jr.

attention to increasing minority participation until just a few years ago, but now the Board is eager to help schools do better, says Ayeola Boothe Kinlaw, the Board's associate director for this effort. That help includes information about successful models around the country, which incorporate many of the ingredients in Márquez's recipe. The board also reduces AP test fees for low-income students. Government programs help cover these fees as well.

But AP courses can't benefit low-income students if they don't get in, and many potentially successful students don't have good grades before they enter AP. So the College Board now recommends accepting students with mediocre records if they are willing to take the challenge. Some of the Board's model programs go to extraordinary lengths to find and recruit promising minority students—everything from entering their names in a drawing for a new car to personal phone calls from the superintendent.

At Garfield, students don't need a high grade point average to qualify, they just have to be willing to do an awful lot of work. No more work, of course, than their teachers.

Márquez, incidentally, doesn't get paid for those extra hours. Why does a man with a degree in computer science put in long hours teaching when he could be making much more money outside?

"Part of it is selfish," says Márquez. "I want to live in a world full of thinking people when I get older. And part of it is, I'm making a difference in their lives." ✔

—Alain Jehlen

For more: E-mail Roy Márquez, roy_marquez@earthlink.net. Order the College Board's booklet of model programs at 800/323-7155.

[DILEMMA]

What do you do when you think student work is parent work?

I have students answer a few key questions from their assignment. Students who did the work finish quickly. When students have problems locating the answers, I offer a private conference. I ask them to explain which parts of the assignment they completed and which parts an adult did. Once we agree that this isn't an accurate reflection of their work, I offer a "Redo," after school under the direction of a teacher. I call home and explain the situation to the parents.

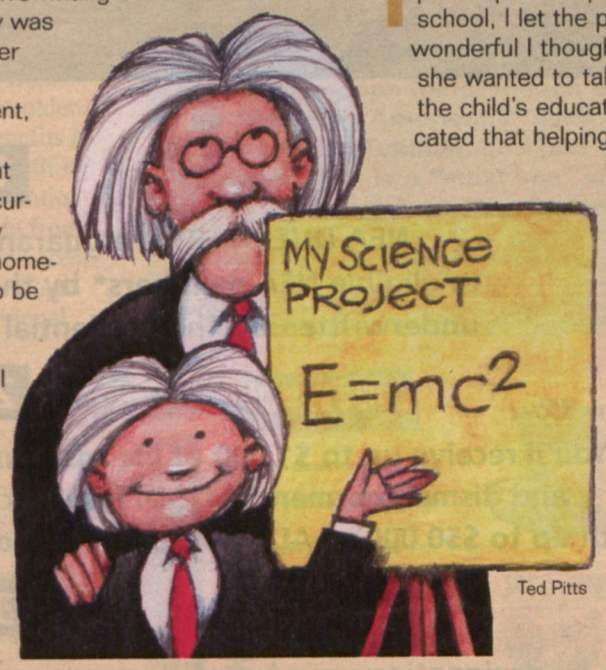
Julie Moore
Junior high school teacher
Seabeck, Washington

Once, I let students finish a test at home. One student, who didn't have the neatest of printing, turned in her test with cursive writing that obviously was not hers, but looked like her grandmother's. Grandma's grade was below 50 percent, so I let it stand!

Sometimes, if a student struggles with printing or cursive, parents may just play secretary to help get the homework done, so you have to be careful when suggesting a parent did the work.

I check homework, but I don't make it a part of the grade. This helps reduce the parent-doing-the-homework problem.

Karyn Keck
Fifth-grade teacher
Chino Hills, California



Ted Pitts

To ensure that parents do not become overly immersed in completing children's schoolwork, teachers could emphasize which part of the assignment the child is responsible for and which part parent and child can work on together. Being specific is the key.

Gwendolyn Lewis-Fondren
English and language arts teacher, 7-12
Sumner, Mississippi

When I encounter this problem, I plan a quiz for the whole class to pinpoint who is actually doing the work. It is not only parents, but sometimes a student's peers who do the homework. I then speak to the class in general about the results of the quiz and let them know my suspicions. Normally students receive this news positively. I tell them assistance is available after school and during my planning period and that they need not rely on someone else to do their work.

I also contact parents and ask them not to do this. I explain that they can keep providing guidance, but should let their sons and daughters do their own work.

Victor Garcia
Spanish teacher
New Bern, North Carolina

I have had several situations in which I suspected that a parent was completing a child's homework. When the parent picked up the child after school, I let the parent know how wonderful I thought it was that he or she wanted to take an active role in the child's education, but I also indicated that helping to do the homework would hinder the child's academic performance as reflected on classroom assessments and possibly the report card.

Colleen Hovanec
Elementary instructional facilitator
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

I bring the child up to my desk and say, "I am glad your Mom wants to help you, but please remember you need to do the actual work." I give the child another copy of the assignment to do again. If it happens again, I talk to the parent.

Michelle Beany
Third-grade teacher
Youngstown, Ohio

Got an answer?

How do you help a student who enters your class in the middle of the year?
E-mail your answer to dilemma2@list.nea.org. Or send by regular mail, or fax to 202/822-7206. Include your name, city, state, and job title. If published, you will receive an *NEA Today* mug!

Real Teachers. . . remember their worst day as a student.

—Paula Logan, high school counselor and teacher, Burlington, Iowa

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❑ Spouse or
❑ Domestic Partner: _____ (First Name / M.I. / Last Name) Date of Birth: ____/____/____

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DTNT0103

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Power Up

Dear Web Editor,

I have a Power Macintosh G3 tower computer. It's a couple of years old now and I'm thinking about getting a new/faster computer. Is there a way to upgrade what I have without buying an entirely new system? Plus, if I get an entirely new system, what do I do with the old one?

Bryan Massengale
Elementary music teacher
Dayton, Tennessee

To decide whether to upgrade your system, start by asking yourself, "How comfortable will I be working under the hood of my computer?" If your answer is very comfortable—and you really should be before attempting an upgrade—then upgrading your computer may be a good option.

A variety of factors, more than can be covered in this column, influence whether an upgrade succeeds and makes economic sense.

The biggest difference you can make to your computer's performance is to increase the speed of the hardware. You can do this by 1) adding more RAM (random access memory) to the computer and 2) replacing the CPU (central processing unit). For our novice readers, the CPU is a chip that functions as the computer's brain and manages all of the computer's operations.

Adding more RAM usually is a simple, effective, and reasonably inexpensive way to boost the speed of a computer. The additional RAM makes the computer less reliant on its relatively slow hard disk. Consequently, applications such as graphics programs and sophisticated word processing programs, which are memory hungry, run much faster.

Replacing the CPU is a slightly more difficult task. The process requires careful research to select the correct upgrade for a given computer, and it usually is a little more difficult for the nontechnical user to make the replacement. In addition, it can often be an expensive upgrade.

If you decide to replace the CPU, start by determining what speed and what kind of CPU chip you need. A computer's CPU speed is measured in megahertz (MHz)—the higher the megahertz assigned to a chip, the faster it can process information. Because companies constantly update specifications and availability of their product, I suggest you check with the manufacturer to verify current upgrade options.

Check out www.xlr8yourmac.com/G3-ZONE/ for the latest information and tips about upgrading your Apple G3 PowerPC. Windows OS users should check out *PC World*'s online upgrade guide at www.pcworld.com/resource/printable/article/0,aid,38605,00.asp.

If you decide to buy a new system, consider donating your old computer to a school. Although not all schools accept outdated computers (the need for technical support to maintain older hardware often outweighs its benefits to the classroom), those that do benefit by decreasing the student-computer ratio. What do you get in return? Aside from knowing you're helping kids gain access to a powerful learning tool, your donation may qualify you for an additional tax break.

Quick Tip

In a hurry to surf the Web? Use the RUN command found on the Windows START menu. After you click the START icon on your screen, select RUN. An open field will appear where you can enter the URL for the website you want to visit, such as www.nea.org. Click OK and your default browser will open and take you to the site.

Got a Question?

Ask the Web editor at webeditor@list.nea.org. Or send your questions by regular mail to *NEA Today*, by fax to 202/822-7206, or through the Web at www.nea.org/cet.

TALK TO US

Have a nifty classroom tip or lesson plan that uses technology? E-mail a description (under 200 words, please!) to wiredclassroom@list.nea.org.

Is there a website, CD-ROM, or piece of software you can't live without? E-mail your favorites—and why you love them—to myfavoritetech@list.nea.org.

Or send your responses by regular mail to *NEA Today*, or by fax to 202/822-7206, or through the Web at www.nea.org/cet.

Those published here will receive a sparkling *NEA Today* mug!

Editor's Pick

America's Story

Want to have some fun with history? Check out www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi, an entertaining and educational website sponsored by the Library of Congress. The site includes games, activities, and stories about America's favorite pastimes, sports, and hobbies; various eras in American history; each of the 50 states; and "Amazing Americans" such as Buffalo Bill Cody, Harriet Tubman, and jazz great Duke Ellington. This is a "must see" site for students and teachers of American history.

TechnoTips

Digital Slide Shows

I keep a digital camera on my desk that students use to record events and activities in the classroom. They might photograph other students working on a project, a visitor to the room, or anything else that excites them.

Then, when they have some free time, they go to the computer, download the pictures, and assemble them into short PowerPoint® presentations. They make a title slide with a name for the activity featured in the photographs and the date for each presentation.

One computer in the room is connected to a classroom monitor, and students can show their presentations on the monitor as looped slide shows. The slide shows are a hit with parents at open houses and parent-teacher conferences. We also post some of the slide shows on our classroom website so parents can see what is happening in our classroom.

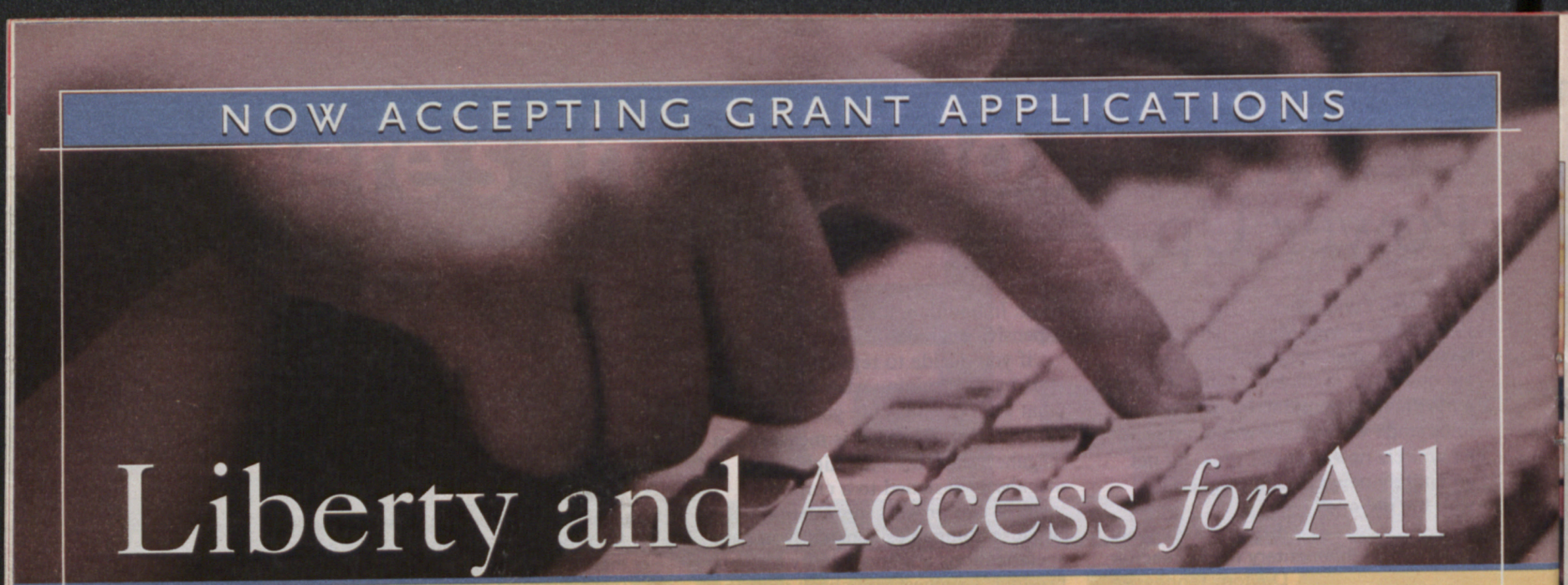
Kathleen Nicholson
Fourth-grade teacher
Amherst, Wisconsin

Web-Based Word Puzzles

Instead of having students do the same activities each week to practice their spelling words, I created spelling folders for my students that contain lists of 25 different activities they can do. Two of the activities listed ask students to use the spelling words in a crossword puzzle or a word search, which a fellow student then completes.

I found a great website to help them with these tasks: www.puzzlemaker.com. The students love going to the site to make their word searches and crossword puzzles. The site includes clear, easy-to-follow directions for each kind of puzzle. I also use the site to make word searches and crossword puzzles in other subject areas. You can make math puzzles, cryptograms, falling phrases, and double puzzles at the site as well.

Corinna Erickson
Sixth-grade teacher
Wabasso, Minnesota



NOW ACCEPTING GRANT APPLICATIONS

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As an educator, you are acutely aware of the frustration many of your students can experience trying to access the information they need to complete their classwork, conduct research or just keep up with homework assignments.

If you have the will to help get your students better connected, the Beaumont Foundation of America has the technology to help you do it.

The Beaumont Foundation of America, a nonprofit organization, assists public, private, parochial and charter schools to integrate technology into instruction by providing the educational technology tools so critical to success. The Foundation is granting state-of-the art, Internet-enabled, wireless laptop computers to qualifying school districts, schools and other educational programs and organizations where a minimum of 50 percent of the students qualify for the National School Lunch Program.

Like you, we want students to have the necessary skills to participate, compete and succeed. These computers can help your students stay connected with the world and take advantage of the unlimited educational opportunities of the Internet. And the benefits to them as students and you as an educator, are as limitless as the information you can help them access.

The Beaumont Foundation of America is granting computer hardware to qualifying non-profits, faith-based and community organizations, libraries, schools and individuals in need. **Grant applications for 2003 now being accepted through March. For more information, including future grant application opportunities, contact the Beaumont Foundation of America at www.bmtfoundation.com or call us at 866.505.COMP.**

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(Most) Americans Agree: Tell It Like It Is

Educators are forever battling over how to present American history. Should we show the good with the bad, or should we strive to develop patriotism by accenting only the positive in our national story?

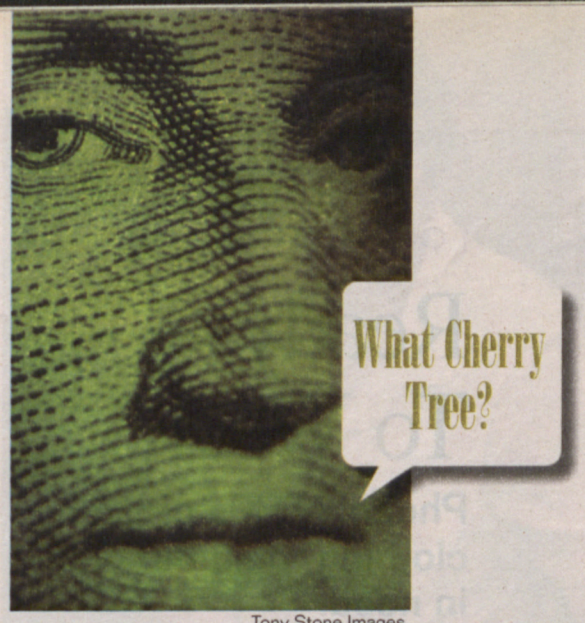
It turns out Americans have an unusual level of consensus on that question. The public opinion research organization Public Agenda asked a random sample of 1,500 adults: "When teaching American history to kids in middle and high school, do you think it's better to place the country in the best possible light, or do you think it's better to teach the bad and the good, warts and all?"

Ninety percent picked "warts and all."

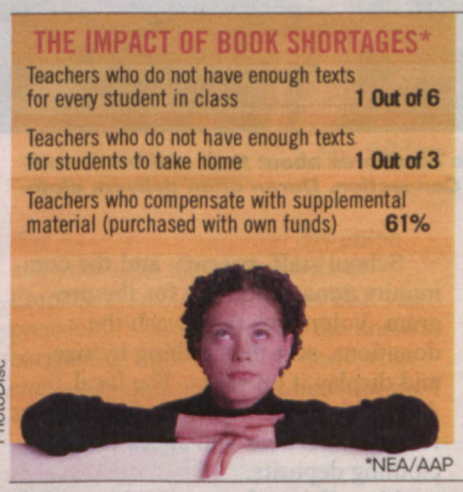
Public Agenda didn't ask about teaching elementary school kids.

Looks like we should 'fess up about George Washington and that cherry tree.

For more, see **www.publicagenda.org/aboutpa/aboutpa_press_release_detail.cfm?list=48.**



Tony Stone Images


THE IMPACT OF BOOK SHORTAGES*
Teachers who do not have enough texts for every student in class 1 Out of 6
Teachers who do not have enough texts for students to take home 1 Out of 3
Teachers who compensate with supplemental material (purchased with own funds) 61%
*NEA/AAP

PhotoDisc

Look, Ma, No Books

One in six teachers say they do not have enough texts for every child, and nearly one in three don't have enough for students to take home, according to a survey of teachers conducted by NEA and the Association of American Publishers.

Where is the book shortage most acute? No surprises here: It's twice as bad in urban areas as non-urban, and nearly twice as bad in schools with large numbers of low-income and minority students.

Of the teachers who are short on texts, 61 percent say they try to compensate by buying supplemental materials with their own money.

And 27 percent report the shortage disrupts classes. Said one, "It was chaotic having the kids share books and not having books to take home to do work."

For more, see **www.publishers.org.**

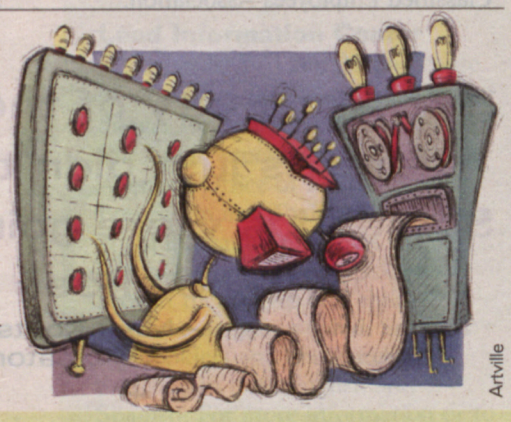
Robo-Readers

Several states are trying out computer programs to score student essays on state tests, reports *Education Week.*

A computer "doesn't need a cigarette break, doesn't need a cup of coffee, and scores the first and last essay the same," explained a software company executive.

The programs first try to figure out what's in the minds of human scorers. They read hundreds of scored essays to see what is similar about essays that got the same score. But since they can't actually think, the programs don't look for clear reasoning or gripping storylines. They stick to writing features that mechanical minds can fathom, including spelling, punctuation, syntax, and so on.

"Ultimately, it comes down to vocabulary," says the same company exec.



Artville

Tony Stone Images

Uniforms Out of Fashion?

They had bipartisan support—both President Clinton and President Bush favored them. But school uniforms, just recently the rage, are already going out of style, according to a *New York Times* report.

It seems that many kids and parents never really liked the idea. "Parents want uniforms. They just don't want uniforms for their kid," a California principal told a reporter.

Two years ago, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found that uniforms were required in about 20 percent of public and Catholic elementary and middle schools and in 10 percent of high schools. (The CDC didn't think wearing uniforms was sick. The numbers were gathered as part of a survey of school safety measures.)

Neither state nor federal authorities track these numbers so there's no way to quantify the rise or fall of uniforms, the *Times* says. But the reporter contacted some districts that adopted uniforms in the 1990s with high hopes to learn what went wrong.

Public school parents can't be required to dress their children in uniforms—that violates free speech—and when some children aren't forced to wear them, other children put the pressure on their parents to relent. Some parents offered uniform waivers to their offspring as rewards for good grades or stuffed them in Christmas stockings.

Still, some schools, especially in big cities, are holding the line. That includes about three-quarters of the elementary schools in the *Times'* hometown.

For more, see **www.nytimes.com/2002/09/13/education/13UNIF.html.**

[OUTREACH]

Ready To Wear

Phoenix ESPs provide clothing to students in need.

Photos by John Miller

"Parents know that there's somebody there who cares about their children's well-being," says Norma Duran of the Clothing Connection. Duran often delivers clothing to her students' homes.

Thanks to the efforts of support professionals in Arizona, students in Phoenix high schools will always have clothes to wear to school. Now, students who didn't even have socks for their physical education classes are provided for, and those with old, tattered shoes can replace them with newer ones.

"Learning is much harder if they do not have anything to wear to school," says Norma Duran, a member of the Phoenix Union High School District Classified Employees Association.

"The majority of the time the parents just didn't have the money. Some kids were going to school with no shoes on."

—Mary Kouts, substitute coordinator and creator of the Clothing Connection

Duran oversees the Clothing Connection, an Association effort that supports students and families who cannot afford to buy clothing. The program keeps in school those students who would otherwise frequently miss class because they do not have anything to wear, Duran says.

Duran, who became chairwoman of the Clothing Connection in November 2001, has expanded the program with help from other members of the Phoenix Association, many of them community liaisons who assist local families and students with their problems. Today, all of the district's high schools have clothing deposits that resemble small stores where students can select the items they need.

Students can go to the clothing deposits on their own or at the request of a school employee. Visiting the Clothing Connection is like visiting the nurse's office to receive a new shirt to replace a ripped one, says Dean Walker, president of the Phoenix Union High School District Classified Employees Association. "But today a student needs more than a shirt," he adds.

School staff, parents, and the community donate clothing for the program. Volunteers then wash the donations, sort the clothing by size, and display it on racks. The local Association also organizes fund-raisers to buy underwear and shoes for the clothing deposits.

Mary Kouts, former president of the Phoenix local, created the Clothing Connection in 1987 at Metro Tech High School.

"The majority of the time the parents just didn't have the money for clothes. Some kids were going to school with no shoes on. It was sad," says Kouts, now the substitute coordinator for the Wilson Elementary School District.

During the first few years of the program, the local Association organized carnivals and pig roasts to raise money for the clothing deposit at Metro Tech. The school's administrators, staff, and students supported the program, Kouts says.

But the program suffered a setback in 1996 when the Metro Tech clothing deposit closed because the school needed the space for other purposes. After the Association lost the clothing bank, the Clothing Connection still received some monetary contributions and provided $150 stipends to students who needed clothing. Students would

Going the Extra Mile

Alabama Job Finder

In a time when factories in Geneva, Alabama, are closing down and migrant workers are leaving the area, the Geneva County Education Support Association is helping migrant workers stay put and find jobs locally, with the help of an NEA ESP Technology Grant.

The local Association used a $3,500 grant to buy a computer with an Internet connection and a copying machine for the professional support office located in a local elementary school. Community liaisons visit the office with migrant workers and help them search and apply for jobs online. Association members hope the efforts will help stop the out migration of workers, stabilize the lives of students, and keep enrollment and funding levels stable.

"We just want the school system to thrive, and if you have a thriving community, you then have a thriving school system," says **Rachel Hicks**, president of the local.

Community Outreach

New Jersey's Millville Education Association (MEA) continues to reach out to the community. Most of the local's 750 members volunteer one hour per month on community projects, such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) and the Police Athletic League. The local also collects money for scholarships each year.

By dedicating time and money to causes that benefit the community, MEA members develop stronger bonds with the area's families, says MEA President **Jeanie Parkhill**, a preschool instructional aide. These ties with the community demonstrate that MEA members help students learn both on and off school grounds.

"I don't ask my members for major

[PROFILE]

Union Commitment

Name: Virginia Benson
Job Title: Human Resources Assistant, Pasco County School Board Office, Land O'Lakes, Florida

What I Do in My Job: I take care of the applications for people who want to be employed as teachers and education support professionals in the district.

The Most Rewarding Part of My Job: Helping people go through the application process.

My Greatest Passions: My children and my grandchildren.

My Favorite Pastime: My union activities with the United School Employees of Pasco. I am an ESP vice president. I have served on the union's bargaining team and have dealt with employers and district administrators. I serve on all committees and am involved in political action and membership drives.

I am also a member of the Central Labor Council, which our union is part of. I have not missed more than a handful of meetings in the nearly 14 years that ESPs have been organized. I have found my work in the union to be fulfilling. I believe strongly in what I do.

My Community Involvement Includes: I am bound two to three days a week with union activities. When my children were younger, I participated in the Land O'Lakes Little League. ✔

Cherie Diez

then go to a store and buy clothing with a school employee.

Unfortunately, the program did not collect enough money to satisfy student demand. So, the program again turned to clothing donations.

Norma Duran began donating her own clothing at Camelback High School two years ago. After a month, Duran's friends and colleagues had donated enough clothing to sustain a clothing deposit. Meanwhile, other ESP members organized a clothing bank at South Mountain High School. These two locations served as models once the Clothing Connection expanded to all of the district's schools in August 2002.

"When we find out a kid needs clothes, we act immediately," says Juanita Tillman, who volunteers in the clothing bank at South Mountain High School.

Students are not the only ones who benefit from the program. In predominantly Hispanic schools such as Camelback, the Clothing Connection has assisted entire Mexican families who had arrived in the United States with no other clothing except what they had been wearing, Duran says.

Since its creation, the Clothing Connection has helped thousands of people in the district.

"Every student who is assisted is a success," says Walker, Phoenix Association President. ✔

—Irene Arce

commitments of their time. But if we each give a little, it all adds up," Parkhill says.

Membership Tracker
Local leaders in the Lane County Education Association (LCEA) in Eugene, Oregon, now have membership information at their fingertips. The local used a $3,450 NEA ESP Technology Grant to purchase handheld computers for its executive board. The computers have updated membership lists and information, says **Lynn Lary**, co-president of LCEA. This information helps the local track current and potential members.

Lane County comprises 16 school districts. Previously, local leaders did not know when new employees were hired because of the large geographic distances between districts. The updated information makes membership recruitment much easier, Lary says.

For more on ESP Technology Grants, visit www.nea.org/esp/espnea/techgrnt.htm.

RESOURCES

Lead Information Center
Exposure to lead is a leading cause of workplace illness and a particular danger for maintenance workers. The Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics offers a variety of education materials to help education support professionals protect themselves and children from the dangers of lead. Some of the booklets and brochures are available in both English and Spanish. For more information or to request publications, call the National Lead Information Center at 800/424-LEAD (5323) or visit www.epa.gov/lead/.

News for Nurses
School Health Alert, an independent school health newsletter, sponsors a free website at www.schoolnurse.com/. The site includes health-related articles, research information, and links to other school health publications. At the site, you also can register to receive a free weekly e-mail newsletter, the *School Nurse-Zine.*

Safe Schools
North Carolina's Center for the Prevention of School Violence offers information and materials for School Resource Officer programs on ways to promote safer schools and positive youth development. The site also includes statistics, research, and grant information. The center is part of the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Visit the center's website at www.ncsu.edu/cpsv/index.htm.

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**All other bank APYs shown in the comparison chart are valid as of 10/31/02, based on balances of $2,500 and a term of 36 months. Source–*Informa Research Services*, 10/31/02.

†Eligible NEA family members include parents, spouse (or domestic partner) and children.

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Education Savings Plans: What's Right for You

Q: My state gives a $3,000 deduction in income tax per child for the Section 529 education savings plan. However, the expense ratio in my state plan is much higher (1.25 percent plus fees for each individual fund) than the one I'm interested in (0.65 percent). I have two children and my tax bracket is 28 percent. Which plan is better for me?

A: These plans are a great option for college savings, but you need to consider the tax rate in your state and the performance of the two plans.

Suppose you put $1,000 in the plan and your state tax rate is 6 percent. You would save $60 in taxes on your money. But you would pay $12.50 a year in expenses. In the other plan, you would pay only $6.50 a year in expenses, but you would have to pay the $60 in taxes. If you look at that in isolation, the in-state plan seems to come out ahead. But low-expense funds are often better funds. Compare the performance of the two plans over a five-year period.

Q: Where can I get information on the catch-up provisions in a 403(b) plan?

A: These arcane rules allow participants to make extra contributions for five years if they did not contribute to the plan when they were entitled to or contributed less than the maximum amount.

If you are in that situation, you need to find an accountant who knows how to calculate your contribution. Someone in your school district or your 403(b) account provider, such as NEA Member Benefits, should be able to help you.

Q: Is there an investment that's good for both inflation and deflation?

A: Treasury inflation-protected bonds (TIPs) show some promise. The U.S. government guarantees that these bonds, introduced in 1997, will provide a return pegged to the rate of inflation. And, because bonds are a great investment in deflationary periods, TIPs look like a good hedge for the inflation/deflation conundrum.

TIPs carry a fixed interest rate but the principal value is adjusted for inflation. Say you invest $1,000 in a 10-year TIP with a 3 percent coupon or interest rate. If inflation is 3 percent over the next six months, the principal of your bond is adjusted to $1,030 ($1,000 plus 3 percent) at the end of that period and your interest is $15.45 or $1,030 times 3 percent divided by two. According to a report on Bloomberg News, if inflation held at 3 percent over the 10-year life of your bond, you would get $351.56 in interest and your principal would grow to $1,344 at maturity. In a period of deflation, your principal would be adjusted downward for purposes of figuring interest payments. But the government guarantees return of principal at maturity.

There is a downside: The increase in principal is taxable as income in the year it accrues, even though you don't actually receive it until maturity. So in the example above, the $30 increase in principal would be taxable in the first year. That makes TIPs unattractive for taxable accounts.

For tax-deferred accounts, though, they're worth examining. A number of mutual funds offer TIPs: Vanguard Inflation-Protected Securities (VIPSX), PIMCO Real Return Bond Institutional (PRRIX), American Century Inflation Adjusted Treasury (ACTIX), GMO Inflation Indexed Bond (GMIIX), and 59 Wall Street Inflation-Indexed Securities (FNISX).

In the September Money column, I wrote that I couldn't open a checking account for my 16-year-old daughter. Many of you wrote to say I should keep trying.

One teacher said her parents opened a checking account for her at age 15 and she got an ATM card at 16, saying, "I believe that this is what helped me not to go crazy in college or as a beginning teacher." Another reader said that when the store where her 17-year-old son works wanted to make a direct deposit of his paycheck, the bank agreed to open a checking account for him.

I was delighted to hear of these successes. How will kids learn to manage money if we don't help them get started with checking accounts and ATM and credit cards?

Mary Rowland is an author and contributor to several financial planning magazines. E-mail your personal finance questions to MoneyQuestions@neamb.com.

Thrifty Educator

This month's tip comes from Brigitte Smisek in Lynd, Minnesota:

On a regular-sized inflatable beach ball, write in the divided colored areas with a permanent marker the five themes of geography: location, place, region, human-environment interaction, and movement. Throw the ball to a student. The theme the student's thumbs land on will be the question he or she has to answer. If the student's thumbs land on "location," he or she will have to state the area's location (for example, southern hemisphere, between the Indian and Pacific Oceans). The student then passes it to another student. Be sure to stress rules for throwing balls indoors ahead of time. On nice days, move the class outdoors.

Beach balls can be used to study other topics, such as:

- **elements of fiction—on the ball, write character, setting, plot, and theme.**
- **events in history—write who, what, why, where, when, and how.**
- **parts of speech—write noun, verb, adjective, preposition, adverb, and conjunction. Students can identify the parts of speech in sentences.**

Deflate the balls when finished for easy storage.

Got an idea?

If you have a suggestion for how your colleagues can save money at school, send it along to neatoday@nea.org.

More than 18,000 members and their families participate in NEA MemberCare programs.

Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits

The New Year is a great time to review family insurance and financial plans. Most members have life and health insurance, but other important types of coverage are often overlooked. Keep your family financially secure with these programs from NEA MemberCare®.

Members who are actively at work should have insurance to guard their incomes. If a disability occurs, the NEA Income Protection Plan can help replace lost wages. Find out if you need supplemental income protection by using our easy calculator. Call the number below and ask for Item #611.

If you're under age 50, secure your financial and retirement assets from the potentially devastating impacts of a serious illness with the NEA MemberCare Critical Illness Benefit. Upon diagnosis of a covered medical condition, this program provides a one-time, lump sum payment of up to $100,000 to spend any way you see fit. The program also pays the one-time benefit in the event of death.

If you are 45 or older, consider the benefits of the NEA MemberCare, Long-Term Care Insurance Program. With this coverage, you don't have to drain all your financial resources to pay for health care services provided in a nursing home, your own home, an assisted living facility, or other types of health care facilities. Family members, including parents and in-laws, are eligible for this coverage.

For more information on these plans, contact NEA Member Benefits at 800/637-4636, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) ET. Or, visit www.neamb.com.

When Parents Part...

School personnel often fill in the gaps for students trying to cope.

Once a week in a cozy, lamp-lit room of the Lake Braddock Middle School in Burke, Virginia, NEA member Jan Furman gathers together a small group of seventh and eighth graders and kindly lets them spill their guts. But not about any ol' thing.

The topic for these sessions is divorce—specifically, how students can better navigate their parents' breakup.

A social worker for the Fairfax County Public Schools, Furman started this "changing family" support group more than 20 years ago and has been leading it nearly every year since. It's been a great avenue, she says, for helping students work out some of the emotion-packed issues that rear their heads when parents go their separate ways.

Paul Tañedo

Social worker Jan Furman says students feel less isolated when they get together to talk about issues around parental divorce.

Problems communicating feelings to the newly divorced parents, the ups and downs of visitation arrangements, splitting holidays, coping with a changed financial situation, understanding stepparents—they're all heady issues, but in Furman's friendly space, they get hashed out, and confidentially. Furman gently offers the professional guidance, and students weigh in with their own thoughts and experiences. They problem-solve, discuss, even laugh—all the while abiding Furman's firm no-shouting rules.

"It may not seem like a big thing," says Furman, "but a lot of kids don't know there's another way to communicate. Their families never did it any other way."

In starting the group when she did, Furman may have been ahead of her time. Divorce in the United States was rising steadily back then—and it has not seen a notable downturn since. Now, government statistics show, 43 percent of all first marriages break up within 15 years. And while some schools have support groups to deal with the fallout for children, many don't.

It's something Furman wishes were different, for divorce can be brutally taxing, she says. Some children handle it smoothly, but others, she says, experience grief, anger, depression and feelings of abandonment. They may act out or become inattentive, withdrawn, aggressive, or easily agitated. They may even pick up eating disorders or start engaging in risky behaviors, such as sexual activity and alcohol and drug use.

For Furman's groups, school counselors recruit the students—about 8 to 12 for each eight-week session. Once parents give their permission for them to attend the meetings, which rotate among different class periods, teachers grant release time. After a few weeks, Furman then invites parents to their own chat session so she can share the students' general concerns.

A common complaint, she says, is the frustrated feeling of being caught in the middle. "Battles between parents hurt kids," says Furman. Some feel forced to take sides or give confidential information. "For instance, the father might ask, 'Does your mom have a boyfriend?' It's tough, but I try to empower them by saying it's okay to say, 'That's between you and mom and I don't want to get involved.'"

Furman says that over the years teachers and staff have become adept at spotting—and helping—students who may be needy because of divorce issues. Still, she advises teachers and staff to:

- Stay alert to changes in behavior (such as lack of concentration and sadness) and be in touch with parents.
- Support having a report card sent to both parents and include both of them in all conferences.
- Be extra sensitive to organization and behavior issues, particularly if the student is an adolescent. They're already sorting through physiological, emotional, and social changes. On top of that, many are often shuttling from one house to another, says Furman. "Cut them some slack."
- Be as neutral as possible when parents separate. This may be difficult if one parent is a known abuser, but it is not the teacher's role to judge.

It takes team work, but helping kids of divorced adults emerge whole and reasonably happy can be done. "Kids can be enriched and profit from two caring parents, even if they are living apart," says Furman.

The trick, she says, is making kids believe it. ✔

—Michele Hodak
NEA Health Information Network

What's Up at HIN?

NEA Health Information Network

■ NEW BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR YOUTH WEBSITE

The National 4-H Council, an NEA-HIN partner, has launched a new website, Building Partnerships for Youth. Located at www.bpy.n4h.org/, the site offers a database of youth development programs that inspire kids, ages 9-13, to make healthy choices and delay sexual intercourse. It also provides resources related to positive youth development, as well as opportunities to interact with colleagues across the country.

■ INDOOR AIR QUALITY TRAINING

For the third year, NEA-HIN helped send NEA members and staff to the Environmental Protection Agency's Annual IAQ Tools for Schools Symposium in Washington, D.C. Participants learned about programs and resources, including EPA's nationwide initiative Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools (IAQ TfS). This program helps school officials assess, resolve, and prevent indoor air quality problems in school facilities. Want to apply to next year's symposium? E-mail or fax your name, address, and telephone number to Jennie Young at jyoung@nea.org or 202/822-7775 (fax).

■ HELP FOR THE UNINSURED

Some 8 million children in America are uninsured, but most are eligible for low-cost or free health care coverage through the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) or Medicaid. Unfortunately, half of all parents don't know their kids may qualify. Now there's a toll-free number from the Department of Health and Human Services' Insure Kids Now Campaign. Calling 877/KIDS-NOW connects families of uninsured children to an operator in their state who can answer questions and start the application process.

For ideas on how to promote low-cost health care coverage in your school's community, visit www.neahin.org/programs/childhealth/backtoschool.htm.

NEA·HIN

[WORKING OUT OUR STRESS]

Resolutions You Can Keep—For Real

Educators often like to brag that their New Year starts in September, but let's face it: When January rolls around, it's hard not to get resolute—about something. Problem is, the ambitious gonna-do list we scribble after singing "Auld Lang Syne" is often history by the time Cupid strikes. How to "get real"? Experts advise starting with small, manageable goals that help relax you and heighten your sense of well-being. Here are a few to write down. Abide by them through the year and you'll do your mind—and body—good.

Visit my doctor more.

Why wait for the pain? Regular doctor visits are often the best way to prevent problems before they start. Think you're not at risk for something? The American Heart Association estimates that 1.1 million Americans will have a heart attack this year and more than 45 percent of them will die. Breast cancer and prostate cancer are just as lethal. In 2001 they claimed the lives of more than 40,000 women and 31,000 men, according to the American Cancer Society. Mammograms and colon, rectal, and prostate cancer screenings are key. But remember: Don't just make the appointment. Go!

Chew my food—s-l-o-w-l-y.

Do you inhale what you eat? Take it easy. You may have only a few minutes, but try to savor your bites, eat mindfully, and enjoy. Many docs recommend chewing your food about 28 times before swallowing. Not only will you love it more, but slowing down aids digestion, reduces excess gas, helps prevent heartburn—and may even help you pack away less. Not a bad incentive.

Get more zzzzz's.

That stack of papers may need grading, but in the long run getting enough sleep will be more beneficial to you—and your students. Inadequate sleep robs your body of vital energy and actually puts you at risk for health complications, including Type II diabetes and hypertension, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Make it your priority to get six to eight hours of sleep each night and avoid caffeine, nicotine, strenuous exercise, and alcohol in the hours before bedtime.

Janet Drew

Wash my hands.

No, we're not kidding. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates one in three people skips the wash cycle after using the restroom. And who knows the sins that follow! To protect yourself and others from a host of infectious diseases, be sure to douse those hands before you eat, after using the restroom, while preparing food and after handling animals, and when you and others are sick. And don't just let a little water trickle over your fingers and call it a day. Wash thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 30 seconds. Nowhere near a faucet? Keep one of those nifty hand sanitizers handy.

Stop complaining and do something.

Tired of sitting around bemoaning the state of the world and your life? Then act. If your elected officials aren't living up to their campaign promises, let them know. If you think school administrators aren't holding up their end of the bargain for students, organize like-minded colleagues to do something. If your family is using you as a doormat, announce that you are not a servant—and mean it. If you're tired of carrying around all that weight, start walking—regularly. Trust us, it'll work wonders for your spirit. And it could actually change things!

—Leah Lakins

By the Numbers

Staying healthy means more than just maintaining a consistent fitness routine and a well-balanced diet. Maintaining good blood pressure and cholesterol levels are key. Get regularly checked, and keep these numbers in mind.

Blood Pressure

Normal	High Normal	High
120/80 to 130/85	130/85 to 139/89	140/90 and above

Cholesterol

Good	Borderline	High
Below 200	200-239	240 and above

HEALTHY BITES

BROWN BAGGIN' IT

For a yummy change of pace, how about a homemade burrito wrap? It's a super quick fix, so give it a whirl. On one side of a large flour tortilla, place two generous tablespoons each of brown rice (cooked ahead and refrigerated), whole black or pinto beans with a pinch of cumin or chili powder, your favorite salsa, and one tablespoon grated cheese. Leftover cooked chicken, pork, or beef can be added if desired. Roll and wrap in plastic. At lunch, place the burrito in a dish, use the plastic wrap to cover it, and heat in microwave 'til warmed through. Sprinkle with fresh cilantro and serve with oranges.

BMI—AGAIN

Oops. In the October issue we gave you a formula to figure your Body Mass Index (BMI), the most reliable measure of your fat to muscle ratio. With your help, we discovered a glitch. Here's the correct formula: BMI equals your weight in pounds times 705 divided by your height in inches squared. Too complicated? Just go to the BMI chart at: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/bmi_tbl.htm.

GOOD QUESTION!

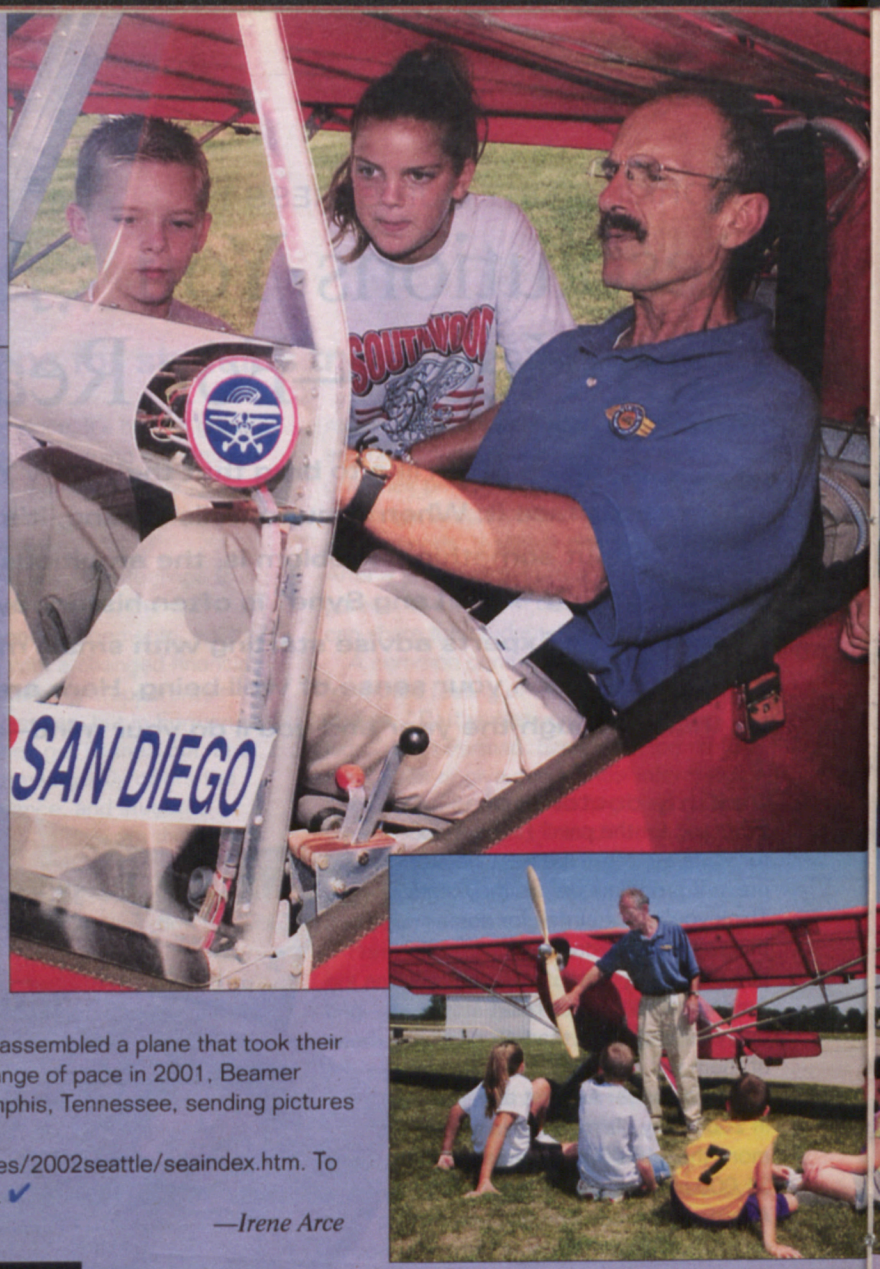
Q: Should people with arthritis exercise?

A: Definitely. Research shows that exercise reduces joint pain and stiffness and increases flexibility, muscle strength, cardiac fitness, and endurance. Arthritis sufferers can perform low-impact exercises such as walking, swimming, and light strength training. Just check with your doctor first for any special risks.

TALK TO US

This is part of a series designed to help NEA members develop healthy habits that beat stress. If you have a comment or question, e-mail mmilloy@nea.org.

Flying High



Indiana teacher **Richard Beamer** trusts his students with his life. Last fall Beamer fulfilled his longtime dream of flying west at treetop level—in a plane built by his fifth-grade students at Southwood Elementary School.

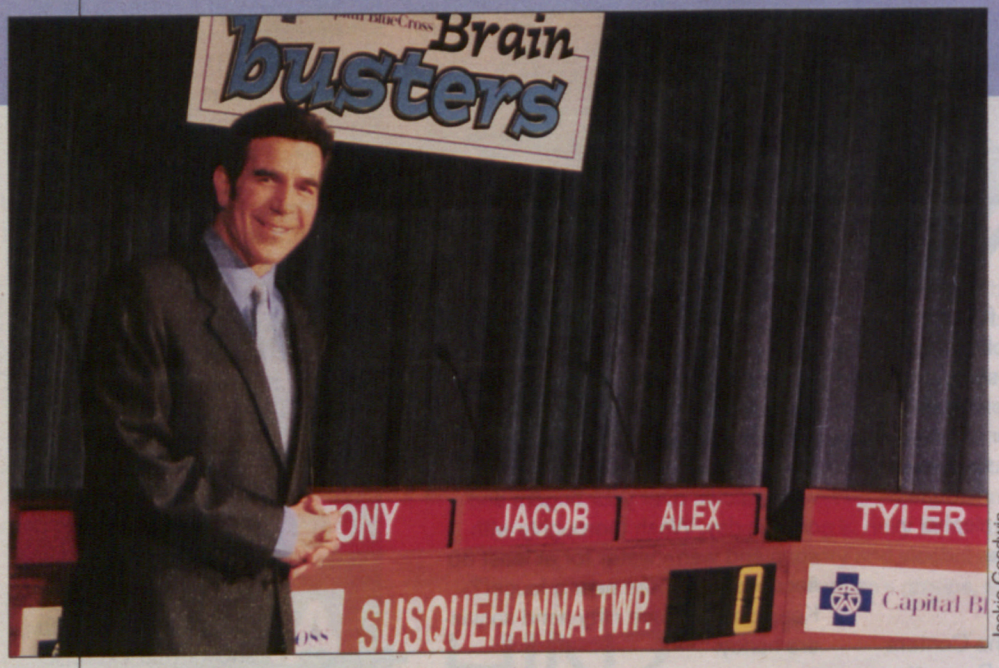
Under Beamer's guidance, students assembled an ultralight, 1930s-style, tube and cloth airplane that took Beamer, a licensed pilot, from Wabash, Indiana, to Seattle, Washington. He traveled for five weeks with a laptop computer and e-mailed journal entries to students during his journey. Beamer received a $2,000 grant from The NEA Foundation for the Improvement of Education to help fund the project.

In addition to preparing for Beamer's trip, students learned how to make webpages, correspond by e-mail, and write online reports about their teacher's progress. Beamer incorporated aviation themes into his reading, writing, math, and geography lessons as well.

Beamer's classes had followed other teachers' adventures on the Internet for years, until Beamer decided it was time his students designed their own project. In 1999, his students constructed an ultralight airplane that Beamer flew from Wabash to Bloomington, Indiana. The next year, his class assembled a plane that took their intrepid instructor to San Diego, California, and back. For a change of pace in 2001, Beamer canoed down the Wabash, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers to Memphis, Tennessee, sending pictures and journal entries to his students along the way.

To follow Beamer's adventure, visit www.msdwc.k12.in.us/ses/2002seattle/seaindex.htm. To find out more about NEA Foundation grants, visit www.nfie.org. ✔

—Irene Arce



Jackie Goodwin

Brain Busters

Every Saturday afternoon, students in Pennsylvania can tune in to see classmates flex their academic muscles on a television quiz show developed by **Richard Rosen**.

"Capital Blue Cross Brain Busters," which began airing about a year ago, features two high school teams in an academic showdown. The show launched its second season in October.

During the half-hour show, Rosen, who also acts as the show's host, challenges students with questions in "every conceivable subject area," he says, from science and literature to pop culture. The team with the most points at the end of the game advances to the next round of competition, until one team triumphs at the end of the season. Members of the championship team split $10,000 in scholarship money and $2,500 cash. They also receive tickets to Hershey Park for students at their school.

"We're trying to elevate our participants to heroes, just like we do with athletics," says Rosen, who teaches gifted students at four elementary schools. "We're committed to academic excellence." ✔

—Kristen Loschert

Table Tennis Anyone?

Rhoda Samkoff is familiar with the phrase "ping pong," a term coined by the Milton Bradley Company back when the leisure activity was confined to the parlor. But what Samkoff plays is table tennis, the highly competitive worldwide sport that has become her passion during the past eight years.

Samkoff, a social studies teacher at Glenwood Elementary School in Millburn, New Jersey, turned to a local table tennis club after an ankle injury forced her to quit ice dancing. Table tennis, which is an Olympic sport in almost every country except the United States, has enabled Samkoff and her team to meet people from all corners of the world. Her training partner, Anani Lawson, hails from Togo, Africa, and Samkoff has traveled to Manchester, England, to face opponents. Last year, Samkoff placed fourth in the women's event at the New Jersey State Championships.

Each school year at Glenwood begins with a table tennis exhibition, where Samkoff and a guest player entertain and impress teachers and students with trick shots set to music. But Samkoff also enjoys "infusing the sport with a new generation of eager players" through her after-school table tennis club, the only one in the Millburn school district. As a certified instructor, she wants to "lend credibility" to the sport and offer students the chance to learn skills in a casual environment, where gender, strength, and skill level do not matter. The school maintains a lengthy waiting list of students eager to join the club.

Samkoff ends each school year with a student tournament. Winners receive trophies from Samkoff's private collection, ones she's collected from her own competitions through the years. ✔

—Lauren Fischer

Photos by Tom Strickland

All Smiles

Michael Patrick

As a teacher in Johnson City, Tennessee, **Carol Transou** noticed how children with dental problems often were teased and, as a result, shied away from classroom activities that brought them attention.

"You might have children who do really well, but when you call on them, they put their hand over their mouth," says Transou, an NEA-Retired member. "You know that teasing is the reason." Poor children were predominantly the ones who couldn't have their dental problems corrected, Transou adds.

That memory pushed Transou to launch Project Smile, a local program that provides selected low-income students with dental care and braces. The Sunshine Lady Foundation gave an initial grant of $10,000, provided that Transou raise a matching amount locally. Johnson City dentists agreed to help with routine care and all five local orthodontists agreed to outfit students with braces at cost. The students' parents pay a nominal fee or an equivalent in-service, and Project Smile picks up the rest of the tab—about $2,000 per child.

Transou has raised more than $50,000 for the program so far.

"I'm hoping we can help to make some life changes for students," she says. "This could certainly be something that gives a child an opportunity for a better life." ✔

—John O'Neil

Norman Y. Lono

Creating Champions

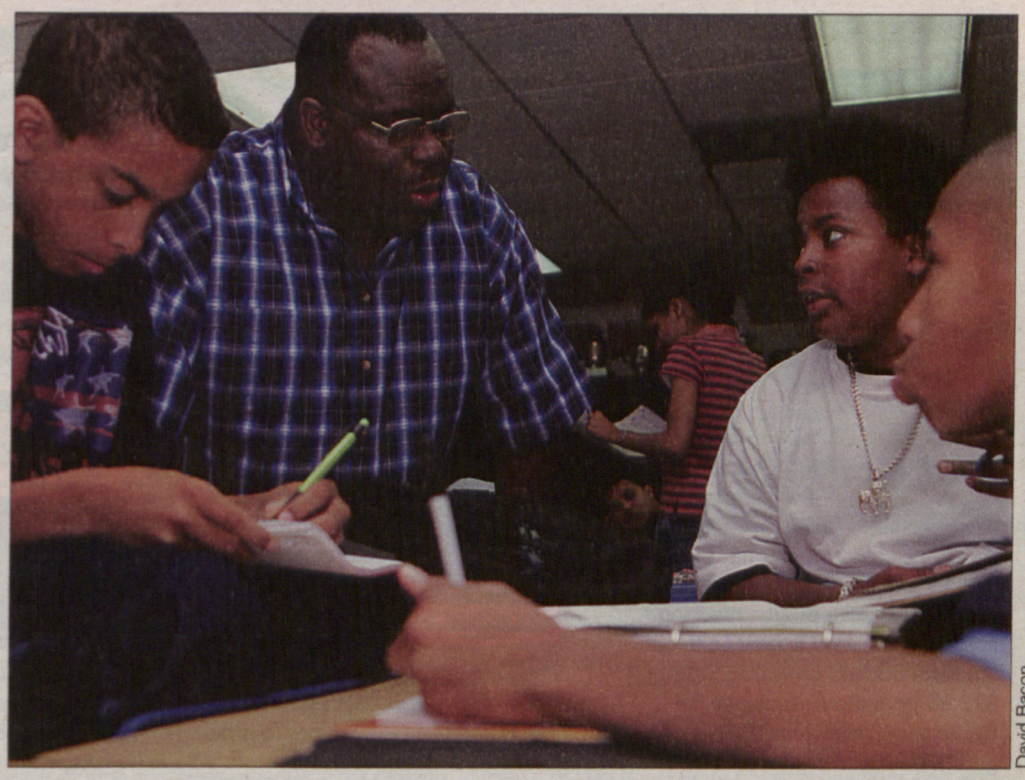
Logan High School teacher **Tommie Lindsey Jr.** sets high expectations for his students as he prepares them for California's forensics competitions. And they meet his standards by delivering powerful speeches and cogent arguments, and, ultimately, by winning.

Lindsey's efforts received national attention in the PBS documentary "Accidental Hero—Room 408," which aired in September. The program documents the inspiring role Lindsey plays in the lives of his students, most of them minorities from low-income families. By developing the skills they need to win in forensics, a field traditionally dominated by affluent white students, Lindsey's students prove that students of color can succeed. His teams have won four state championships in the last seven years.

Lindsey's students learn more than just how to sustain coherent arguments. They learn about diversity and teamwork, while they build self esteem, poise, and confidence. Nearly all of Lindsey's forensics students go to college.

Lindsey enjoys watching reluctant students blossom in the forensics program as they develop the necessary skills to succeed. "It's satisfying to take the student who many others considered a troublemaker and watch him turn into a champion," he says. ✔

—Irene Arce



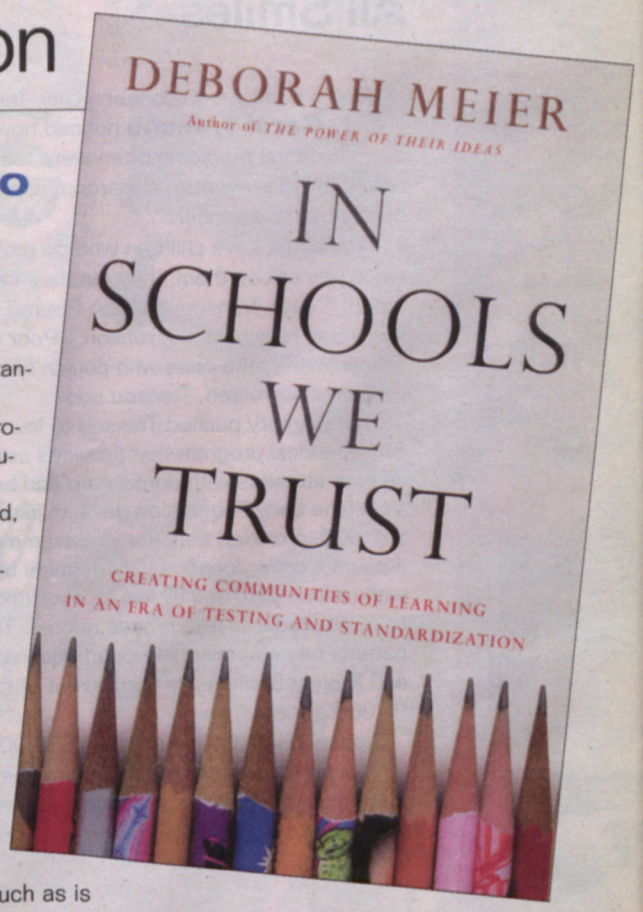
David Bacon

GOT A TIP?

Do you have an interesting story idea? Contact Kristen Loschert, section editor, at kloschert@nea.org.

Building Trust in Public Education

Why standardized tests are the worst way to hold schools accountable—and what the alternatives are.


DEBORAH MEIER
Author of THE POWER OF THEIR IDEAS
IN SCHOOLS WE TRUST
CREATING COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING IN AN ERA OF TESTING AND STANDARDIZATION

IN SCHOOLS WE TRUST: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization
By **Deborah Meier**
200 pp. $23 hardback; Beacon Press (www.beacon.org).

Many NEA members who read this insightful, eloquent book share Deborah Meier's sense of disbelief that our public education system is not really trusted to educate children. Sadly, a "fundamentally new level of distrust" of schools has imposed on public education a perverted notion of accountability driven by testing, standardized schooling, and more and more bureaucracy.

With passion and grace, Meier argues that the kind of accountability seen in state after state, and reinforced by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, is bad for schools, educators, and most of all, for children. It diminishes the power of public education, belittles educators' professional judgment, and ignores what we know about how best to organize schooling and educate children. It will not educate all children, or close the achievement gap, or transfer to students the "democratic habits of mind" that are key to the future of a democratic, pluralistic society, says Meier.

But there is an alternative—trustworthy public schools. These are schools that parents, the school board, and the broader community trust to make important decisions on behalf of children. They are small, personalized schools with strong family ties. Organized around fundamentally different relationships between students and teachers, teachers and families, and teachers to each other, they accept being held accountable for their work because they are in charge of making major workplace decisions.

Meier has founded and run several trustworthy schools, first in East Harlem at the celebrated Central Park East School, and more recently in Boston. *In Schools We Trust* is dotted with stories of the successes, failures, and lessons learned from these schools, all of which are public schools built around trusted adults. Meier shows what these schools are like and why trust is connected to social and academic learning.

Meier also makes a compelling case why the alternative to trusting schools, "trust through testing," is the worst way to hold schools accountable. She masterfully debunks the "quasi-science of testing," including the current generation of standardized tests that are linked to state content standards.

These tests are inappropriate measures for evaluating schools' effectiveness, she argues. Instead, we should evaluate local schools by collecting evidence in multiple forms about the schools' and students' performance. Bring in expert and lay reviewers to examine the evidence, which might include standardized test scores but also would rely on professional judgment and seek second opinions much as is done in medicine.

Should we strive to create schools built on trust in an era of standards and accountability? Absolutely. Is it possible to create such schools? Yes. Deborah Meier has done so, and her book is full of suggestions for creating schools that we as educators would trust to educate our own children.

Creating and sustaining such schools is hard work. Trust, Meier reminds us, must be continually earned, and in the end is all about accountability, but accountability that makes sense.

—Marcie Dianda
NEA Student Achievement Department

EXCERPT

"We are witnessing a radical redefinition of the task of public education, driven by the widespread belief that by focusing our attention on externally imposed tests we can both produce higher achievement and restore public trust in our schools....quite the opposite is true: the increasing use of standardized tests both undermines achievement and increases the distrust we have for teachers, students, and our own judgments."

BOOKS by NEA Members

Essential Ingredients: Recipes for Teaching Writing
By Sandra Worsham

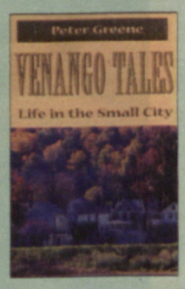
Explore the differences between "school" writing and "real" writing and learn to make both forms work for K-12 students. The author, a 30-year teacher of gifted and at-risk students, includes many of her mother's recipes and childhood stories in this volume filled with proven teaching tips, activities, and exercises to get students hooked on writing. 188 pp. $23.95 from the Association for Curriculum Development. To order, go to www.ascd.org.

Little Kids–Powerful Problem Solvers: Math Stories from a Kindergarten Classroom
By Angela Giglio Andrews and Paul R. Trafton

A preschool and kindergarten teacher and a math professor celebrate the math capabilities and achievements of young children through stories that describe kids' learning, problem solving, and reasoning. Quotes from NCTM's *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics* appear throughout. 101 pp. $13.50 from Heinemann Publishing. To order, go to www.heinemann.com.

Venango Tales: Life in the Small City
By Peter Greene

The author—a teacher, musician, and dad—chronicles his life in Frankin, Pennsylvania, a small city of nearly 8,000. The book is a collection of weekly columns from two local newspapers in which Greene discusses the charms of living in a small town, his experiences as an educator, and other observations. 302 pp. $19.95 plus s&h from XLibris. Go to www.xlibris.com/VenangoTales.html or call 888/7XLIBRIS.



Fox and Fluff
By Shutta Crum, illustrated by John Bendall-Brunello

Author, storyteller, and children's librarian, Shutta Crum tells the story of big, bad Fox—who eats chickens—and Fluff—a cute chick who believes Fox is his papa and won't leave. So what's a tough guy to do? Take on the challenge of fatherhood and find out how much he has to offer. Add one story to your classroom where the fox turns out not to be the bad guy. 32 pp. $15.95 from Albert Whitman and Company. To order, call 800/255-7675 or 847/581-0033.

FREE OR INEXPENSIVE

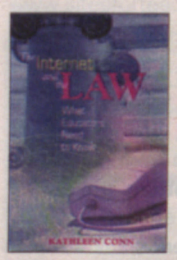
Keep Schools Marijuana-Free

Middle and high school educators can download a free drug-prevention guide to help deter teens from using marijuana. Created by the New York Times Newspaper in Education Program, "Anti-Drug Education with The New York Times: Focus on Marijuana" is available at www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/NIE/focusonmarijuana. The 88-page, easy-to-use teaching tool contains 12 lesson plans, reprints of relevant *New York Times* articles, student worksheets, extension activities, and resource information, all of which may be photocopied and distributed for classroom use.

Justice for Janitors

Here's a children's book to inspire and inform. This brightly illustrated, bilingual tale documents the 2000 Los Angeles janitors strike through the eyes of young Carlitos, son of one of the strike organizers. Author Diana Cohn thoughtfully portrays the struggles of working people and the successes of the Justice for Janitors campaign. Educational on many levels, *¡Sí, Se Puede!/Yes We Can!* also includes a classroom poster with information on the history of labor unions, along with an article on the real-life inspiration for Carlitos' mother. $15.95. 32 pp. from Cinco Puntos Press. To order, call 800/283-3572.

The Law of the Internet



As technology use grows, the ability to monitor the appropriate use of the Internet has become difficult. In *The Internet and the Law: What Educators Need to Know,* Kathleen Conn discusses the legal issues public schools face when using the Internet. From First Amendment protection for teachers and students, to downloading copyrighted material, the book is filled with vital information for educators. 90 pp. $20.95 from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. To order, call 800/933-2723.

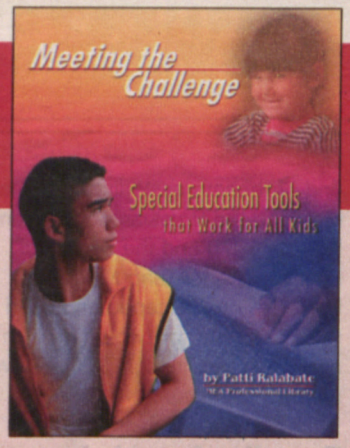
Looking at Language Arts

Author Nina Zaragoza writes letters to preservice and in-service teachers to share her ideas on strengthening the language arts classroom. *Rethinking Language Arts: Passion and Practice* offers graphs, lesson plans, interviews with students and teachers, and many other tools, all to make the language arts classroom a more rewarding place for students. 219 pp. $24.95 from Routledge. To order, go to www.routledge.com.

Ben and the Bully

By Sandra Patterson

Writing for children ages 8 to 12, school psychologist and elementary teacher Sandra Patterson explores the feelings of children who have difficulty being accepted by peers and provides hope that they can be accepted. In her book, Ben overcomes his own fears and uses positive actions to face a bully. 92 pp. $15.50 (hardback), $9.95 (paperback) plus s&h from 1st Books Library. To order call 888/280-7715 or visit www.1stbooks.com.



From the NEA Professional Library

Meeting the Challenge: Special Education Tools that Work for All Kids
158 pp. $15.95 NEA members
$19.95 nonmembers
#2022-7-00-PL

Meeting the Challenge gives busy educators the tools they need to teach a class full of students with various skill levels and special needs. Teachers will find effective strategies to use with students struggling to overcome academic or behavioral difficulties. The book provides a tool kit of specialized resources to prepare every educator to meet the individualized needs of any student. The tool kit includes sample checklists, IEP goals, co-teaching lesson plans, rubrics, behavior intervention plans, conference planning sheets, and other resources teachers can copy and use or modify to make their own.

To order, call 800/229-4200, or check the Web at www.nea.org/books

EXCERPT

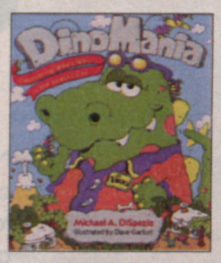
After you collect data about your student's performance, you're ready to analyze it. Keep these guidelines in mind:

Visually represent your data. It's amazing how a series of scores can look like paint drippings when listed on a sheet of paper but turn into a clearly defined picture of your student's skill levels when presented on a chart or graph. Line and bar graphs are particularly effective ways to present a series of percentages.

Look for obvious gaps. Analytic rubrics and checklists can help you identify gaps in student learning....

The Truth About Dinosaurs

Dinosaurs remain misunderstood creatures, especially among kids. In *Dino Mania: Discovering Who's Who in the Jurassic Zoo* author, teacher, and science activity developer Michael A. DiSpezio educates children and exposes some of the myths they have about dinosaurs. Illustrated by Dave Garbot, the book's facts, definitions, activities, and projects, can teach kids the real story behind these fascinating creatures. 78 pp. $19.95 from Sterling. To order, call 800/805-5489.



October Issue Update

Teachers wishing to register for the chance to receive a free laptop from the Teacher Laptop Foundation should go to www.teacherlaptop.org. The Foundation only supports registration and information requests via its website.

TVTIPS

Freedom: A History of Us

PBS, January 12, in primetime, check local listings.

Through archival film, artwork, rare photographs, and first-person accounts read by an all-star cast, this series of eight, one-hour episodes tells the finally triumphant story of American freedom seen through the eyes of patriots, pilgrims and pioneers, slaves, women, immigrants, and laborers. The series begins in the summer of 1776 as the original 13 colonies stake everything on independence from England—and freedom. Later episodes include Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society," the Vietnam War, the march to Montgomery, Nixon and Watergate, the hostage crisis under Jimmy Carter, the end of the Cold War, the growth of terrorism, and the attack on the World Trade Center. The series is based on the book series of the same name by Joy Hakim (Oxford University Press).

Picture History

TV Tips are provided by KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., www.kidsnet.org, and from Cable in the Classroom at www.ciconline.org.

TVTIPS

Biography Special: The Impressionists

A&E, January 7-10, daily at 7 a.m., ET, check local listings.
Filmed on location around the world and featuring interviews with world-renowned art historians, this four-part program tells the story of a revolution in art through the eyes of its most important practitioners.

Parts 1 and 2 explore the origins of impressionism, when a group including Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro, and Claude Monet began to paint using short strokes, commas, and dots to rapidly capture a moment in time. Parts 3 and 4 chronicle the end of the impressionist movement, including the Prussian occupation of Paris in 1870 and the deaths of Pissarro, Renoir, and Monet. Episodes can be taped and used in the classroom for two years with an accompanying lesson plan at www.aande.com/class.

Benedict Arnold: A Question of Honor

A&E, January 13, 8 p.m., ET, check local listings.
Actors Aidan Quinn and Kelsey Grammer are featured in this two-hour Revolutionary War drama that traces the events that lead to betrayal by one of the Continental Army's most decorated soldiers. Arnold was considered a great general on both sides of the battlefield and a trusted and distinguished soldier of General Washington's army, but Congress failed to acknowledge his contributions to the war effort. Losing the support of his peers and heavy in personal debt, Arnold became bitter. After marrying a British sympathizer he began to question his commitment to the American Revolution.

Adriano Giordanella/The DeAngelis Group

Just Deal

The N, January 13, 8 p.m., ET.
A new teen sitcom follows the friendship of Dylan, Jermaine, and Ashley, three teens from different backgrounds that attend the same high school. Dylan and Jermaine have been best friends since the sandbox, but their relationship shifts when Ashley arrives. Smart, funny, and pretty, she demonstrates through her actions and upbeat attitude that everybody's got problems—you just have to deal.

NBC Photo/Chris Haston

Blue Planet: Seas of Life

Discovery Channel, January 27-31, daily at 9 a.m., ET.
Explore the world's oceans and their widely varied inhabitants in this Assignment Discovery series. Traveling to every continent on the planet, this compendium of life includes sea otters, leafy sea dragons, whale sharks, bottlenose dolphins, half-moon fish, the world's largest colony of gray seals, and more. Tape and use in the classroom for one year.

Save Our History: American Lighthouses

The History Channel, January 31, 6 a.m., ET.
This program looks at some of the most famous lighthouses that line America's coasts, recounting their historical significance and looking at the efforts being taken by preserva-

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tionists to save them. The show can be taped and used in the classroom for two years with an online lesson plan at www.historychannel.com/classroom.

Matt Hickey

The Weather Classroom: Hurricanes

The Weather Channel, January 27 and 30, 4 a.m., ET.

This series helps students explore weather phenomena in ways that would not be safe in person and can be taped and used in the classroom forever with a lesson plan at www.weather.com/education. "Hurricanes" flies with hurricane hunters to study the basic ingredients of a hurricane, uses satellite images to track hurricanes, and talks with eyewitnesses to the destructive force of a hurricane.

I Spy

HBO Family, Saturdays in January, 8 a.m., ET (repeated 1:30 p.m.), check local listings.

This animated play-along adventure series for children ages 4-7 is based on the I Spy books photographed by Walter Wick and written by Jean Marzollo. The series adds an interactive game and whimsical characters to the riddles in each 30-minute episode. Both the book and the TV program are based on the idea that children's creativity and visual skills can be enhanced by encounters with everyday objects like plastic forks, buttons, paper clips, and toy cars.

Science Friday Kids Connection

NPR Fridays, 2–4 p.m. each Friday, ET. Broadcast via radio.

"Science Friday," hosted by science journalist Ira Flatow, discusses the most current scientific issues of the week. To support each show, KIDSNET has produced an online middle school science curriculum that correlates each program topic to national science standards and offers learning activities and resources. The radio program is available on NPR stations nationwide and via RealAudio on www.npr.org. The curriculum is available at www.kidsnet.org and www.sciencefriday.com.

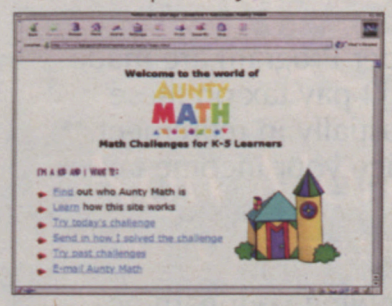
WEB WINNERS

Websites for Teachers

This site has thousands of links to websites and resources for teachers, all ranked by popularity. Find links to lesson plans by subject, offers for freebies, and even a site with hundreds of essays and term papers to help you determine if your students are cheating from the Internet. Go to www.sitesforteachers.com.

K-5 Math Challenges

This kid-friendly site from the DuPage Children's Museum consists of math problems written as stories about Aunt Mathilda. Students can post solutions and receive a reply from Aunty Math about their solution strategy. Based on the NCTM *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*, the site has modifications and information about the math involved in each problem for parents and teachers. Go to http://auntymath.com.



The Power of Story

The Circle of Stories website from PBS honors American Indian storytelling and the importance of that tradition by using documentary film, photography, artwork, and music to explore this custom. The site presents songs and stories from several tribes and uses RealAudio, video, photos, graphics, and Flash animation to enhance compelling words and rhythms. Go to www.pbs.org/circleofstories/.

Preschool Possibilities

In search of fresh themes and activities for your preschoolers? This site contains more than 150. Choose from pets, dinosaurs, the grocery

Weaver Travels Through Midwest Meeting Members

Teachers in Red Wing, Minnesota, were in the third week of a bitter strike when NEA President Reg Weaver arrived to help. Weaver was in the midst of a four-state listening tour—hearing from members about their successes, the challenges they face, and how their Association can help them meet those challenges.

In Red Wing, the challenges were severe. The district's health insurer had jacked up premiums 65 percent, and the district wanted educators to pay for the increase. Many members felt the sting of the superintendent's lack of respect for staff. Teachers had been working without a contract for 18 months, and support professionals had been laid off early in the strike.

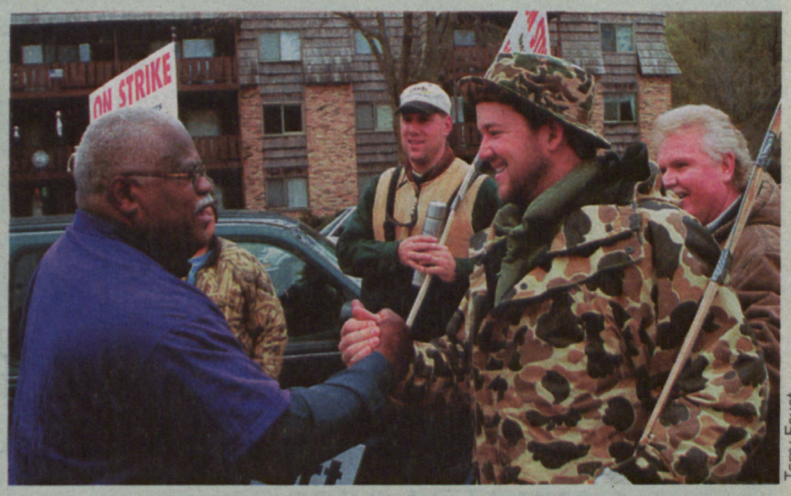
Education Minnesota President Judy Schaubach escorted Weaver, with reporters and camera crews in tow, to the local Elks hall filled with striking educators and their community supporters. Starting in a stage whisper and rising to what one teacher called "his playground voice," Weaver praised and encouraged the strikers, telling them, "You're not doing this just for you. You're doing it for everybody who comes after you."

Soon, he left his podium and microphone behind, moving through the hall, engaging individuals and the whole group at the same time. "They want to tag you as a special interest," he said. "Tell them, 'My special interest is children and public education. I want every child to have a school we can be proud of.'"

The next day, October 30, Weaver and a new set of reporters visited NEA members at Center High School in Kansas City, Missouri. Here, relations with the administration were warmer—the superintendent greeted him—but educators faced another obstacle: testing mandates. The school has been put on a state "academic concern" list. Many students are from low-income families, and there's more than 40 percent turnover every year.

Weaver listened to members concerns—the school is "a moving target," one teacher pointed out—and also reached out to students. At one point, he corralled a group of high schoolers and urged them to shake off labels and aim for achievement.

In South Dakota, last stop on this listening tour, fresh snow covered a high school lawn as Weaver burst through the door, greeting everyone—teachers, the superintendent, a custodian, secretaries, students, even the school dog. At four schools, Weaver taught impromptu lessons about our political system, danced the hokey-pokey with special education students, and discussed voting rights with a history class. He told students that when he was in school, he was informed after a career aptitude test that he could never do anything except work with his hands. The test didn't predict Weaver's successful college record, and he remembered that when he



Terry Faust

Reg Weaver encouraged educators on strike in Red Wing, Minnesota, during his recent four-state Listening Tour.

became a teacher. "It's not right to have your future determined by the results of one test," he said.

Meeting with NEA members after school, Weaver fielded questions about testing, special education, and school funding. And he stressed one of his central themes: "All children should have access to a quality school that is free from intimidation and harassment, and has an atmosphere that is conducive to good teaching and learning."

—Alain Jehlen

[At press time, the strike situation in Red Wing,Minnesota, had been settled favorably for the educators.]

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store, Dr. Seuss, shapes, and more. Each theme contains related songs and activities as well as ideas for art projects, snacks, bulletin boards, and field trips. Recipes and articles are also included. Go to www.everythingpreschool.com/themes/index.htm.

Back to Nature

This nature Web guide contains an extensive listing of field guides for animals, plants, flowers, and seashells. Visitors can check with wildlife, birding, and backyard experts and search the Web for news articles and photography related to their favorite species. Other features of this National Wildlife Federation site include step-by-step guides to creating backyard habitats and weekly news features. Go to www.enature.com.

Slavery and the Courts

If you're looking for material for Black History Month, you may want to check out a new addition to the Library of Congress website, "Slaves and the Courts, 1740-1860." This collection features some 100 pamphlets, books, speeches, and court transcripts and documents regarding the experiences of slaves in the American colonies and the United States. Access the collection under the American Memory section of the Library of Congress site at www.loc.gov.

Money Matters

Money—we need it and spend it all the time, but what are its origins? The British Museum's World of Money site explores the history of money, how it is made, and how it's affected humanity. Games, timelines, and graphics add depth to this interesting resource. Go to www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/worldofmoney/index.html.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Board Certification Loans

NEA members seeking National Board Certification during the 2002-03 school year can apply for a low-cost loan to help cover the $2,300 assessment fee. The NEA National Board Certification Loan, offered by NEA Member Benefits through MBNA America Bank, N.A., is a revolving line of credit with an annual percentage rate (APR) of 7.90 percent. There are no application fees, no prepayment penalty, and no collateral is required.

For more information about NEA National Board Certification Loans, call 800/603-3953 from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday–Friday and from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday and Sunday (ET). Applications are accepted over the telephone. (For more information about the National Board Certification process, call the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards directly at 800/22-TEACH.)

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Lifetime pre-retired subscriptions are available to active NEA members now. Call your state affiliate today and request information on your state's retired program and unified pre-retired membership. Or write to NEA-Retired for a national program packet at 1201 16th Street, NW, Suite 410, Washington, D.C. 20036-3290, or e-mail Tcrenshaw@nea.org.

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†Annual fee for the NEA *Platinum Plus* and NEA School Days credit cards: None. The Indexed Annual Percentage Rates (APRs) for purchases and cash advances are 9.9% for the NEA *Platinum Plus* card and 11.85% for the NEA School Days card: each Indexed Rate APR may vary. The current introductory APR offer for Balance Transfers and Credit Card Cash Advance Checks made with either account is 1.9% through your first nine statement closing dates effective upon the opening of your account. If your minimum monthly payment is late (*i.e.*, not received by 2 p.m., ET, on its Payment Due Date), or when the introductory APR expires, the non-introductory APR for your account ("Indexed Rate") is calculated using the Variable-Rate Information. If your payment is late, the Indexed Rate is applied to new and outstanding cash advance balances (consisting of Balance Transfer and Cash Advance Check transactions) as of the first day of the billing cycle in which the payment was late or not received. Transaction fee for Bank and ATM cash advances; credit card cash advance checks and balance transfers is 2% of each cash advance ($2 minimum, $30 maximum). Transaction fee for the purchase of wire transfers, person-to-person money transfers, money orders, bets, lottery tickets and casino gaming chips is 2% of each such purchase ($2 minimum, $30 maximum). **Transaction fees are waived on transactions requested with your application. MBNA allocates your payments to balances (including new transactions) with lower APRs before balances with higher APRs.** Balance transfers and/or cash advances of any kind may not be used to pay off or pay down any other MBNA account. If your available credit cannot accommodate any transaction, fee and/or finance charge, the account will be subject to over-the-credit-limit costs. The introductory APR is not applicable to Bank and ATM Cash Advances. **REMINDER:** To obtain the benefits of the grace period for new purchases, you must pay your New Balance Total in full and on time.

‡Certain restrictions apply to each benefit as described in the benefits brochures which are sent soon after your account is opened. NEA School Days Card Customer benefits differ from those available with the NEA *Platinum Plus* account, *i.e.*, benefit coverage amounts are lower and MasterPurchase protection is not available.

NEA School Days Card credit line runs from $500 to $5,000, while NEA *Platinum Plus* credit line is from $5,500 to $100,000 for eligible applicants.

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Absolutely NO membership dues are used to market this program.

MBNA America Bank, N.A. is the issuer and administrator of this credit card program.

The NEA Credit Card Program® has been developed for NEA members and their families only. If a member decides not to renew membership, that person and his/her family will no longer be eligible to receive the preferred rates, fees and special promotions offered through the NEA Credit Card Program. If eligible, a replacement card will be offered. Any account opened in response to this offer will be governed by the laws of Delaware.

The information about the costs of the cards described in this application was accurate as of 1/2003. The information may have changed. To find out what may have changed, please call (888) 758-7946. TTY users please call (800) 833-6262.

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NEA Foundation Grants

The NEA Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE) now offers NEA Fine Arts Grants to public elementary school art specialists through their local NEA affiliates. These grants allow fine arts educators to create and implement programs that promote learning among students at risk of school failure. The deadline is February 3, 2003. For more on eligibility and guidelines, visit www.nfie.org/programs/finearts.htm.

NFIE also offers Arts@Work Grants to encourage public secondary school arts specialists to collaborate with technology-savvy educators and the business community to develop examples of technology-integrated arts curricula that meet high standards for student achievement. This program is supported in part by a National Endowment for the Arts grant. The deadline is March 3, 2003. For more on eligibility and guidelines, visit www.nfie.org/programs/artsatwork.htm.

THE NEA FOUNDATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT of EDUCATION www.nfie.org

Remember, NFIE's Innovation Grants and Learning & Leadership Grants are offered on an ongoing, year-round basis, so why wait? Visit www.nfie.org/programs/howtoapply.htm today to apply, or call 202/822-7840 with questions.

Deduct Those Expenses

January starts tax season, but this year teachers get a little relief. Educators working at least 900 hours during the school year as teachers, instructors, counselors, principals, or aides can subtract up to $250 of qualified expenses when figuring their adjusted gross income (AGI). Itemization is not necessary, but hang on to those receipts. For more, see the IRS Publication 3991, "Highlights of the Job Creation and Worker Assistance Act of 2002," at www.irs.gov, or call 800/829-3676.

Liberty Day

How well do your students know our country's founding documents? Encourage them to study the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and to increase their knowledge of the role our liberties play in society by participating in Liberty Day.

Celebrated officially on March 16 and unofficially the rest of the year, Liberty Day is a non-partisan volunteer effort to educate all Americans about our founding documents. Teachers can obtain free booklets with the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, have students study them, and then take students out to quiz adults on their knowledge of the documents, motivating kids by letting them be the teachers.

Other Liberty Day activities include essay contests and having local elected officials speak to classes about the importance of our liberties. Many states have their own coordinators to help you order booklets and plan activities for your school or community. For more information, see www.libertyday.org.

DIVERSITY Calendar

January

January 13—Coming of Age Day
Japanese youth are considered to be adults at age 20, when they assume the responsibilities of adulthood and can legally vote. On this national holiday, celebrated the second Monday in January, 20-year-olds dress in traditional formal clothing, take part in a coming of age ceremony, and often commemorate the event with formal photos. For more, visit www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Towers/2060/culture2.html or www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/calendar/january/seijinshiki.html.

January 20—Martin Luther King Jr. Day
This federal holiday recognizes the life and accomplishments of King (1929-1968), civil rights leader, minister, and winner of the 1964 Nobel Prize. For more, visit http://thekingcenter.com/tkc.html.

February

Black History Month
This month—the successor to Negro History Week—was initiated in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Woodson was concerned that the contributions of Black Americans were overlooked or misrepresented. He chose February because it contains the birthdays of two figures prominent in Black American history: Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Negro History Week was extended to a monthlong celebration in 1976. For more, see http://creativefolk.com/blackhistory.html.

February 1—Lunar New Year
Chinese, Koreans, and Vietnamese observe this festive New Year, which takes place during the first three days of the first lunar month (late January or early February). People exchange gifts and food, visit family members, remember ancestors, forget grudges, and settle business accounts. A different animal symbolizes each year—2003 is the year of the ram. For more, visit www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/heritage/festivals/he_fest_new.jhtml or www.teachervision.com/lesson-plans/lesson-6603.phtml.

Mandel Teacher Fellowship Program

The Mandel Teacher Fellowship Program is developing a corps of skilled secondary school educators who serve as leaders in Holocaust education. Up to 15 educators in grades 7-12 will be designated as Mandel Fellows. These educators must show evidence of extensive knowledge of Holocaust history, successful teaching experience, and participation in community and professional organizations. They will participate in a five-day, all-expenses paid summer Institute at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., designed to immerse them in advanced pedagogical issues.

Following the institute, Fellows will create and implement an outreach project in their schools, communities, or professional organizations. In May of the following year, Fellows will attend a follow-up program at the Museum.

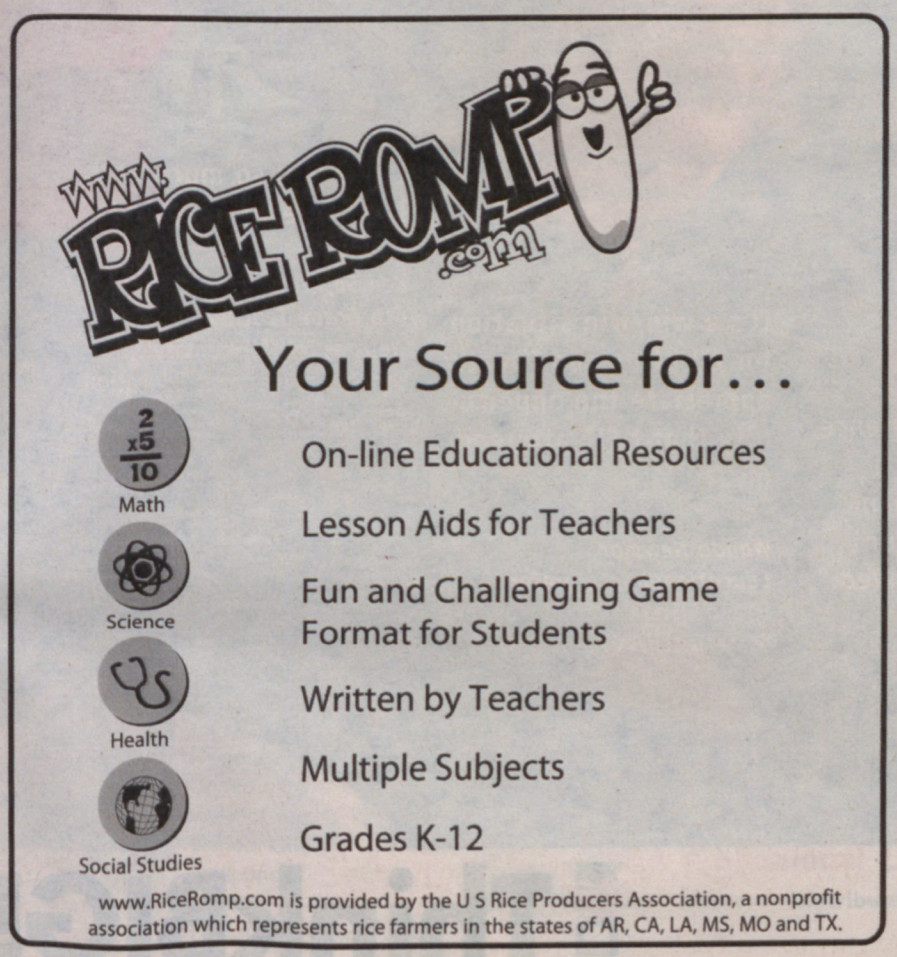
History, social studies, English, and foreign language teachers, as well as librarians and instructional media specialists, are encouraged to apply, but other content areas are also eligible. Teachers must teach in U.S. schools and should have taught the Holocaust for at least five years.

The application deadline is February 17, 2003. For more information, go to www.ushmm.org or contact Daniel Napolitano, Coordinator, Mandel Teacher Fellowship Program by phone: 202/314-7853, fax: 202/314-7888, or e-mail: dnapolitano@ushmm.org. Or write to Mandel Teacher Fellowship Program, Education Division, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW, Washington, D.C. 20024.

Kids Philosophy Slam

Let students try their hand at philosophy by entering the annual Kids Philosophy Slam contest. Students must answer the question "What is the meaning of life?" K-4 students (and special-needs students of all ages) may paint or draw a picture to express their ideas on the question, and students in middle and high school can write a 500-word or fewer essay, based on personal experience.

Winners will be chosen from each grade level, and four high school finalists will be invited to compete at the Kids Philosophy Slam Debate in April in Minnesota. The deadline for entries is January 20, 2003. For more information, visit www.philosophyslam.org or e-mail info@philosophyslam.org.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Imaging Lab Director
South Burlington School System, Vermont–NEA
"Student learning is at the heart of what we do. That's what The NEA Foundation grants are about."
Gayle Nakayama
Reading Teacher
Larchmont Elementary School, Washington Education Association–Retired
"It's nice to feel revitalized going into my twenty-ninth year of teaching."
Jacqueline Burke
9th–12th Grade English Teacher
Beaver Dam High School, Wisconsin Education Association
"The results of my research and experience can be of value to a wider audience. Thank you for the opportunities you have provided."
Patricia Quinteros
K–3 Bilingual Teacher
Pine Grove Manor School, New Jersey Education Association
"It's a win/win situation for all of us and I really appreciate the opportunity that NFIE afforded me."
Wanda Newman
Educational Interpreter
Friendly High School, Maryland State Teachers Association
"I owe you so much and I am forever indebted!"
Ken Sopelak
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Webster Hill Elementary School, Connecticut Education Association

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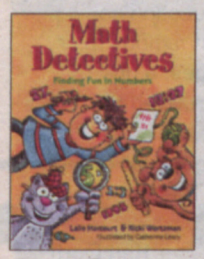
Early childcare experts Pam Schiller and Pat Phipps have compiled a great book for educators who teach three- to six-year-olds. *The Complete Daily Curriculum for Early Childhood* has 1,200 activities to engage all multiple intelligences. With 14 themes that each include assessment tools and lists of related children's books, this publication provides new and interesting ways to educate young children. 576 pp. $29.95 from Gryphon House Inc. To order, call 800/638-0928.

Math for Student Sleuths

For many children, math can seem difficult or boring. But authors Lalie Harcourt and Ricki Wortzman change this with *Math Detectives: Finding Fun in Numbers*. The book asks questions and provides activities that make young students math detectives, encouraging them to have fun with numbers while they learn some math. 48 pp. $14.95 from Sterling Publishing. To order, call 800/805-5489.

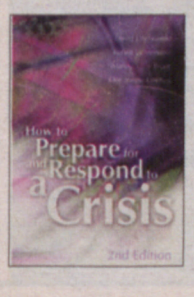


Looking to Volunteer?

If you want to volunteer but don't know where to begin, thumb through *Make a Difference: Your Guide to Volunteering and Community Service*, which lists more than 140 national, nonprofit organizations. Written by Arthur Blaustein, adjunct professor at the University of California and faculty advisor for the AmeriCorps program, the listings are arranged according to service area, and include a brief description of each organization along with contact information. 124 pp. $10.95 from Heyday Books. To order, go to www.heydaybooks.com.

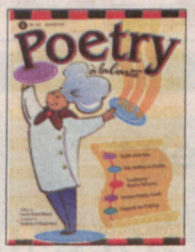
Crisis in the Classroom

A crisis in school can be devastating, but with *How to Prepare for and Respond to a Crisis*, it no longer has to be. Based on the work of the School Crisis Response Initiative of the National Center for Children Exposed to Violence, this book provides steps and guidance to survive any crisis that touches a school. All methods in the book have been field-tested and used by schools and communities throughout the country. 96 pp. $18.95 from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. To order, visit www.ascd.org or call 800/933-2723.



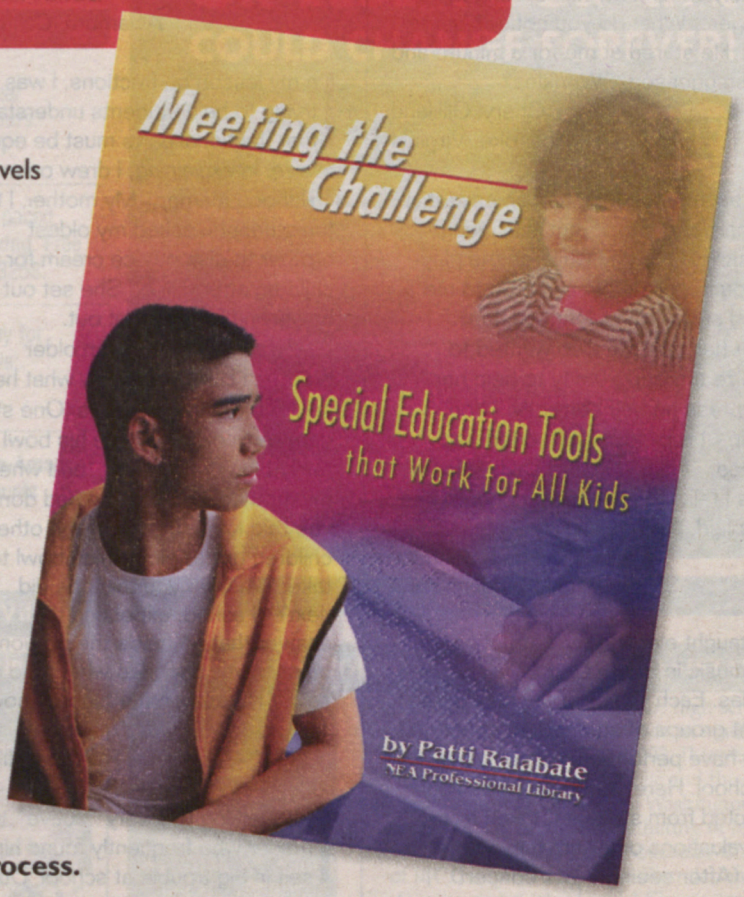
Tasty Portions of Poetry

Teaching middle school kids how to write poetry has never been as easy as teaching them how to write essays or book reports. With *Poetry à la Carte*, author Connie Homan Weaver changes all that by giving teachers classroom-tested ideas for introducing students to poetry. From useful information on the most-used poetic devices to lessons on writing original poems, the book provides plenty of activities to get students writing poetry. 120 pp. $15.95 from Dandy Lion Publications. To order, visit www.dandylionbooks.com or call 800/776-8032.



Are you "meeting the challenges" of today's classrooms?

Classrooms today are full of students with various skill levels and special needs. To be an effective teacher, you need effective strategies to help students struggling to overcome academic or behavioral difficulties. *Meeting the Challenge: Special Education Tools that Work for All Kids* provides specialized resources designed to help you meet the individual needs of any student. This valuable toolkit addresses six critical areas:



- ✓ **Evaluating struggling students using classroom-based assessments.**
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in the Light Lane

Skin Treatment

I was encouraging one of my seventh-grade students to complete the comprehension questions that followed a story. "We know two things about the character's description," I reminded him. "We know that she had pierced ears. What else do we know?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know."

"Look at me," I hinted, elaborately twirling my hair around my finger. "What do you notice?"

He stared at me for a minute and then guessed, "Wrinkles?"

Cheryl Gilliland
Roanoke, Virginia

I teach preschool, and an essential part of our program is language skills. One day while on the playground, a little girl came up to me and said, "Mrs. Johnson, I fall." I felt her pain but also wanted to seize the opportunity to help her express herself correctly. "You fell?" I replied. She nodded her head, "I fall." Finally I said, "Honey, it's I fell." With evident concern she replied, "You fall too?"

Barbara Johnson
South Windsor, Connecticut

I taught elementary instructional music in South Central Los Angeles. Each year, I would take different groups of students to concerts, or have performers come to our school. Here are some gems I collected from students, taken from evaluations or letters they wrote:

- (After seeing a jazz concert) "I like jazz because it has a lot of weird sounds I never heard before."
- "I like the brass, the flu, and the clarinet."
- (After taking students to see a performance of Baroque and early classical pieces) "My favorite instrument was the popsichord."
- "The woman playing the French horn was real tite."
- "The third violin was playing real fast. I hope she didn't hurt her fingers."
- "I liked the concert because we didn't have to go to school!"

David Howells
Alhambra, California

In my lesson on fractions, I was trying to help students understand that fractional parts must be equal in size. In explaining, I drew on a childhood memory. My mother, I told the students, asked my oldest brother to dish out ice cream for the children after dinner. She set out four bowls and he dished it out.

"If any of you has an older brother, I'll bet you know what he did next," I told the students. One student replied, "He made his bowl really big." Yes, I said, "and when my mother saw what he had done, she told him that one of the other children got to pick which bowl to take. What do you think he did next?" I asked, expecting the answer that he made the portions equal. I was shocked when one boy said, "He spit on the biggest bowl!"

Diane Fischer
Rockford, Illinois

I was talking to a very "active" third grader who frequently found himself in big trouble at school. During our heart-to-heart talk, I mentioned the word "conscience." He immediately asked, "What's a conscience?" I then explained, "It's that little voice inside your head that tells you when you're doing something wrong."

Without missing a beat, he replied, "I'm so sick of that voice."

Carla Ketter
Madison, Wisconsin

I was helping the son of a fellow teacher add end punctuation to sentences in a story. He was stumped at how to punctuate, "Don't you ever do that again!"

Thinking an example might help, I offered, "Let's pretend you are a little kid playing with matches on the back porch. You accidentally set fire to the trash can. Your dad comes out and puts out the fire. Then he turns to you and says, 'Don't you ever do that again!' What goes at the end of that sentence?" Immediately, my student said, "You damn fool!"

Sharon O'Neal Wirtz
Sante Fe, New Mexico

Got Laughs?

● Have a funny school story, anecdote, or vignette you'd like to share with other NEA members? You can send contributions to "In the Light Lane"
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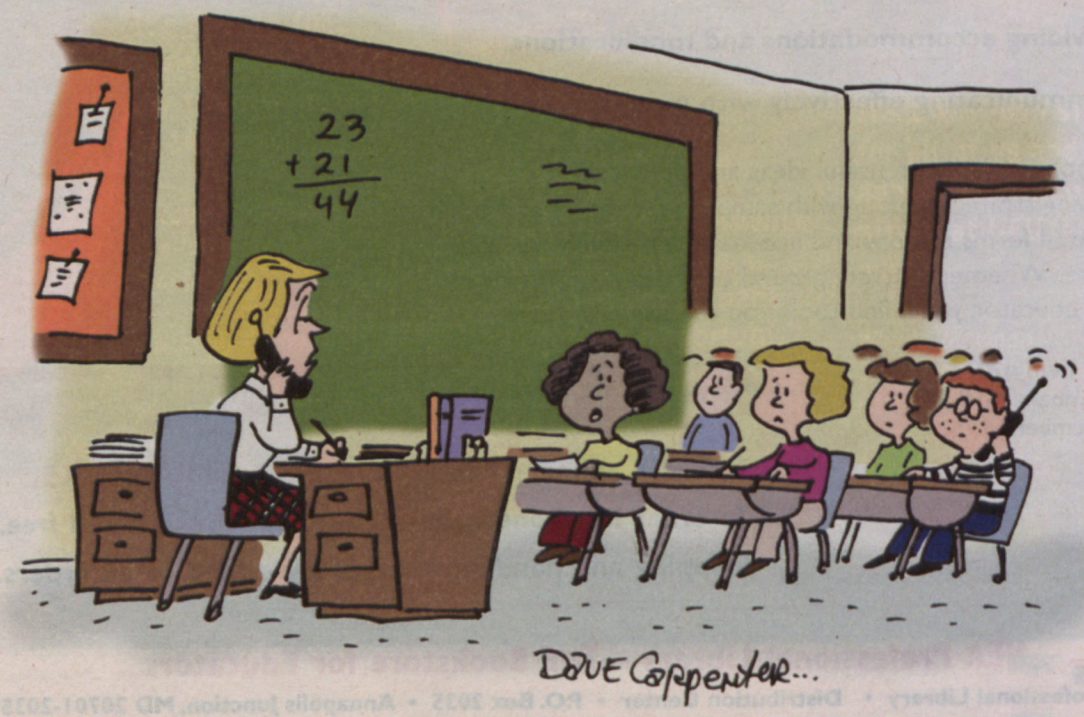

"Yes, Jason, you may go to the lavatory, but next time just raise your hand."

Poets' Perils

My ninth graders were writing biographies on famous poets, listing their education, great accomplishments, family, and information on their birth and death. One of my students wrote of her poet that "he died of a weekend heart."

Kathy Gonzalez
San Jose, California

In my early days of teaching, I was amused by a couple of memorable short answers on my sixth-grade social studies tests. The first, following our study of the Roman empire, responded to a question asking for a definition of "rostrum." The answer? "It was a Roman restroom."

The second was in response to a question concerning the most famous ruler of the Middle Ages, a great conqueror who revived the political and cultural life of Europe following the fall of the Roman empire. The answer: "Charles Mange."

Karl Dorff
Mt. Vernon, Indiana

On a recent exam in my fifth-grade math class, students were asked to name the multiplication property for the number sentence: 52 x 1 = 52. One student wrote: "Dementor Property." Maybe I'm pushing them too hard?

Gina Strandlien
Granite Quarry, North Carolina

One morning a new ninth grader paused by my Spanish room and pointed to the piñatas hanging from the ceiling. "Wow, look at those piña coladas," she exclaimed to a friend.

Marjorie Rios
Livingston, Tennessee

A former French II student stopped by my classroom to chat. I asked him how his new French III class was going. "Great," he replied. "Kim is my conversation partner. I'm really good at vocabulary and she's really good at grammar. Between the two of us, we make the perfect French student!"

Kimberlee Moyer
Florissant, Missouri

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